

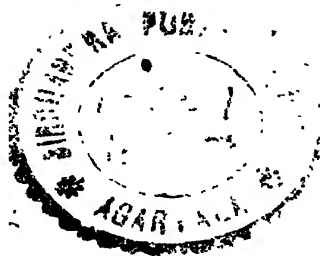
Blue Dragon Days

BOOKS BY
MABEL ESTHER ALLAN

Here We Go Round
Strangers in Skye
The Vine Clad Hill
Black Forest Summer

Mabel Esther Allan

BLUE DRAGON DAYS



HEINEMANN

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TO
MY COMPANION IN ITALY

ONE

A Summer in Italy?

THROUGH A HIGH WINDOW BEHIND JANE GRAYDON'S left shoulder the April sunshine fell in a warm stream, so that she soon had to stop work and take off her neat little scarlet jacket. It was five o'clock and in half an hour she could leave the office of the Silver Shell Insurance Company and join the people hurrying along Kingsway.

Insurance! She settled grimly to her work again, but she felt hot inside as well as out—restless, unsettled and almost frantically anxious to be free. That evening, she vowed to herself, as she gave three-quarters of her attention to the policies before her, she would get out somewhere—anywhere. Along the Embankment, across Hyde Park, even out to Hampstead perhaps. But she knew that the sun pouring through the rather dusty glass was deceptive, for there was a sharp east wind outside, and, at lunch-time, the daffodils had been blowing wildly on the street-traders' barrows. It had been a bitter spring so far, and by the time she had got home to the flat in Kensington and had had her evening meal the

wind would be colder than ever and the April brightness would be fading.

It wouldn't matter so much being cooped up all day long if only she *liked* her job; if only she could take an interest in insurance. But the only policies she could take a genuine interest in were the holiday ones, and those nearly always cost her a pang. Lucky people who, as early as the middle of April, were hurrying off to France, Switzerland, the Italian Riviera, even to Yugoslavia and Greece! Insuring their luggage for fifteen days . . . three weeks. . . . Paris, Milan, Rome. While she, Jane Graydon, was anchored in London, along with innumerable less fortunate people, with only the prospect of a fortnight's holiday at some as yet unnamed time. September or even later, probably, since she was so very junior. She had only been employed by the Silver Shell since last November—three months before her eighteenth birthday.

"What's the matter?" asked the girl at the next desk, as Jane sighed gustily and tossed back her silky dark brown hair.

"Oh, nothing really, I suppose. Just restless. What a long day it's seemed!"

"Oh, well, soon be over!" said Sally Taylor cheerfully. "I'm going to the ballet tonight—*Coppélia*."

Yes, it was ten past five and it would soon be over, for the time being. But there would be tomorrow and the next day. Months and months of similar days. And yet some girls really seemed to like working in offices. They met plenty of men, and weren't paid badly, and

the work wasn't exhausting. Men! Who cared about men? And Jane glared so fiercely at one of her young male colleagues a few yards away that he blushed and looked uncomfortable.

• Bother! And he was nice, too, if she could even bring herself to care. But it wasn't dull young men like Michael Beddows that she wanted. It was travel . . . to see new places . . . to meet people of other nationalities.

When she had decided to take a commercial training she had certainly never intended to end up with a firm like the Silver Shell. She had meant to make herself very efficient and get a wonderful job that would soon take her abroad. But the trouble was that she had not been especially good at shorthand, and book-keeping was altogether beyond her. She had almost given up her training and tried something else—something where she would meet people and learn to deal with them—but it was high time, she felt, that she was earning.

So the result had been that the few really interesting jobs had gone to her more efficient contemporaries and she had, out of sheer pride in the end, taken the job with the Silver Shell. Not that Jane was really inefficient. It was just that, though she had tried hard, she had never been able to put her whole heart into the work.

The sun had moved right on to her shoulders now, but it didn't matter. It was just on half-past five. She put her papers away thankfully and was making her way to the cloakroom when she was called back.

"Someone wants you on the telephone, Miss Graydon."

"Oh!" Jane took up the receiver with a faint stirring of curiosity. No one ever called her at the office, not even her mother. A cheerful, confident voice spoke at the other end of the wire.

"That you, Jane? Rosemary speaking. Look here! I want to see you about something rather important. Will it be all right if I come round tonight?"

"Oh, yes, Rosemary, of course." Rosemary Graydon was her first cousin—an attractive young woman of twenty-five, whom Jane admired a good deal. An evening with Rosemary would be more enlivening than a solitary tramp over Hampstead Heath.

"How's the job?" asked the familiar voice. "Still hate it?"

"Yes, I'm afraid so. It makès me feel like a lion at the Zoo. Caged. I suppose it's frightful of me. Other girls —"

"Well, you don't have to be like other girls. You're an individualist and it never hurt anyone in the long run, my child. Anyway, what I've got to say may interest you. I hope so, anyway. Seven-ish?"

"Seven-ish," Jane agreed, and hung up with an oddly light heart. Rosemary, at any rate, understood, even though she was in an office herself. But then the Blue Dragon Tours office in Regent Street was a wonderful place, full of brilliant posters and railway time-tables, and Rosemary was already in a position of responsibility. She had several times spent a few months at Blue Dragon offices abroad and certainly wasn't caged.

"Date with your boy friend?" asked Sally brightly, as

Jane reached the cloakroom and began to put a dusting of powder over her clear, pale complexion.

"Oh—no," Jane said, almost absently.

"Well, you seem to have cheered up. You aren't exactly a little ray of sunshine, are you? If you could have just one wish what would you choose?"

"Travel," said Jane briefly and saw her companion's eyebrows lift in faint amusement.

"Travel! What a funny kid you are! I think it's over-rated myself. I went to Ostend last year and it rained every day but one. Makes me uncomfortable to hear foreigners yattering and the money's so awkward. But I suppose you mean America, or South Africa, or the South Seas?"

"Anywhere would do," said Jane.

"Oh, well, I forgot your mother's Italian. I suppose it makes a difference."

"Perhaps," agreed Jane, and put on her grey coat and smart little grey hat. She took up her handbag, said a hasty farewell, and dashed downstairs into the brilliance and noise of Kingsway.

Five minutes later she was queueing for her bus, and all the way home she was wondering what Rosemary had to say that was so important.

The Graydons' flat was in a large, converted house in a quiet road behind the Albert Hall, and when Jane let herself in with her latchkey her mother was preparing the evening meal. She was a tall woman, with a touch of elegance, though her clothes were ordinary enough. Her husband was not particularly well off and Giovanna

Graydon rarely felt justified in buying expensive clothes, but even so she still had an air. Her hair was dark brown, nearly black, and her eyes were brown, too, set rather deeply in a clear, pale face. Jane was like her in a way, but she had inherited her father's dark blue eyes. Mrs. Graydon spoke English with only the faintest trace of an attractive accent, for she had been in England for more than twenty years.

"Rosemary's coming tonight," said Jane, when her father had arrived and they were sitting down to the meal.

"Oh, good!" said Mrs. Graydon. "Perhaps she'll cheer you up. You've been looking very dismal lately."

"Poor little Giovannina! She doesn't like that job!" said Jane's father, and his wife flushed.

"She took it of her own free will. And I wish you wouldn't call her that, Francis. You know I hate it."

"I know," he said soberly. "I'm sorry. But it suits her so much better than the English version. Jane! It's such a plain little name."

Jane ate in silence. Even after so long her mother could still be touchy about her Italian origin. Jane's father was her second husband. She had met her first one, Kenneth Quentin, nearly twenty-two years before, when he had been working in Genoa and she was the spoilt and petted darling of an important Genoese family. Giovanna Lerrante was beautiful, rich, and placidly used to the thought that she would probably make an advantageous marriage with a fellow countryman. Then she had met the good-looking but by no means rich English-

man, and after that she had known no peace. Once she had fallen in love she was a different being, to the utter dismay of her family, who had never expected to have to contend with anything of the kind.

In the end she had married Kenneth, and, the moment she became Mrs. Quentin, had ceased to exist as far as her family was concerned. It was really her father, a somewhat stern and hard man, who had a great respect for money and position. Her mother, Giovanna had always been sure, would never have "cut her off with a shilling", as the English saying went. But Giovanna had always been proud and pride turned her firmly against all thoughts of appealing to her family, either then or when her young husband died after a year of marriage. She had found herself a job teaching Italian, but, after a very few months, had married Francis Graydon. She had been happy, but only very rarely would she talk to Jane of Italy; perhaps when her only child was ill or needed comforting. Mostly she chose to forget as nearly as possible those early years in the great city of Genoa, beside the sometimes blue and sometimes grey and wind-tossed Mediterranean.

Rosemary arrived on the stroke of seven—cheerful, eager and very smart. Jane said:

"Shall we go up to my room? We can talk there." She led the way upstairs and switched on the little electric fire while Rosemary took off her coat and looked round.

"My dear child! It must be like *living* in a travel agent's!" For there were posters of vivid continental

scenes on the plain cream walls, a pile of coloured time-tables on a side table, and over the bed a map of Europe showing the principal railway lines.

"I like it," said Jane. "Though I'm saving up to get some of those lovely Italian paintings. The really modern ones, with harbours, and coloured awnings, and sun-drenched squares. You know?"

"Hum! Well, perhaps I can suggest something better. Behold in me Fate. How'd you like to work in Genoa for the summer?"

Jane stared at her blankly, faint colour coming and going in her cheeks.

"Oh, don't tease! I can't bear it. I'd go to Australia at a moment's notice."

"Well, sorry I can't arrange that. But this is genuine. How much notice do you have to give the Silver Shell?"

"A week, I think, but——"

Rosemary sank down in the cream basket chair and Jane flopped on to the bed, since her knees suddenly felt too weak to support her.

"Good! I thought that might be it. Well, look here! *Would* you like to go? You see there's a vacancy for a junior in the Blue Dragon office in Genoa and I can get it for you if you want it. In fact, I've pretty well accepted on your behalf."

"Oh—Rosemary!"

"Of course you're young to work abroad, but you speak a little Italian and quite good French, and you've been abroad before."

"Only with the school. To Switzerland, and to

Brittany and Germany. I had to save hard every year. Doing without most things."

"Well, I'm sure you thought it was worth it, and you've got the right attitude. None of your 'I don't like foreigners—never trust the beggars!' about you. The attitude of the average Briton makes me sick. They never seem to realize that they're the foreigners in another country. And dash it! You *ought* to go to Genoa. In a way it's your own city."

Jane's heart was beating wildly. Genoa! How often she had read about it—thought about it! That great city of docks and slums, wonderful palaces and huge modern squares. A city of romance and squalor and unexpected beauty. The city where her mother had been young and very gay; going to the opera and the ballet, shopping in the Via XX Settembre.

She said faintly:

"But I tried in the autumn. You tried. I couldn't get into the Blue Dragon then."

"No, there weren't any vacancies. You struck very unlucky. But now they'd like to have you. They did send a girl a month ago, from the London office. But she was no good. Homesick and hated it. She's back and is getting married soon. And there's no one else suitable in our office. We're busy, anyway, with the summer rush coming on. The Genoa office is only small and it's in the Via Balbi, as you know, I think."

"That's where—the Lerrantes have their shipping offices."

"I know. In part of one of the old palaces. Very, very

posh! You'd be a junior, at everyone's beck and call, but Mr. Morrison, the manager out there, is a decent sort, and the others aren't bad. I know them all. They deal with the Blue Dragon tours that pass through or start in Genoa, but there's quite a lot of individual travel too. Some would be office work, but often you'd be behind the counter, helping people, looking up trains, seeing that the more lost and idiotic ones didn't end up in Milan when they meant to go to Rome. All manner of things."

"Where—would I live?"

"With an Italian family who take a few business people. I believe they're charming, though that young idiot Maureen couldn't make head or tail of Italian life. But, mind you, it would only be until the autumn——"

"Oh! Then I'd have to look for another job?"

"Not necessarily. The Blue Dragon people might fit you in in London or perhaps in one of their provincial offices, and then you might be able to go off again next year. That's in the air, of course, and would depend on how you shape. But if ever a girl was born to work in a travel agency *you* were!"

Jane gave a shaky laugh.

"It doesn't sound a—a very feminine thing to be born."

"What of it? You're very feminine in many ways. And you'll be really good looking when you fill out and get happier. Well, what about it?"

"Oh, I'll go. I'd go tomorrow. But—you realize that Mother will hate it? She may not let me go."

Rosemary frowned. She knew about the faint bitterness that Giovanna Graydon felt for her lost city and country.

"I don't believe she'll stop you. She knows you've hated insurance."

"Yes, but—anywhere but Genoa! It's such an odd coincidence——"

"Oh, rubbish! We'll go and put it to them now. People must do what they want, provided it doesn't hurt others too much."

"It *will* hurt her," said Jane, and she rose soberly, her first wild excitement almost forgotten.

"One side of her might be glad. And you aren't all plain English Jane; there's a lot of Giovanna."

"Perhaps, but don't call me that. She—Father called me Giovannina at tea."

"She should never have insisted on Jane; it doesn't suit. Well, come along, my child!"

They went down the stairs, Jane trailing behind her cousin. She was a prey to joy and terror in about equal proportions and the next half-hour was likely to be difficult to live through.

Jane and the Blue Dragon

AT FIRST GIOVANNA GRAYDON WAS SPANKLY DIS-
approving and almost unfriendly towards her
niece.

"It's very good of you to bother, Rosemary," she said very stiffly. "But Genoa—no, I think not. Jane is too young, and—well, I could never agree. She *is* too young, don't you think so, Francis?"

Jane's father glanced from his wife to his white-faced daughter.

"Well, now, she's eighteen and she thinks of nothing but travel."

"Well, but this wouldn't *be* travel. Just to be shut up in some little office in Genoa."

"She'd be in Italy and getting to know a great city. She'd be able to see something of the Riviera at week-ends, too, and how can we deny her that?" And he glanced towards the big window, where the earlier brightness had given place to cold, sleety rain. "Think of Jane in the sun. At Nervi or Rapallo. Bathing, perhaps, while we're still shivering."

"The sun by no means always shines in Genoa," said Mrs. Graydon, still stiffly. "And no Italian would bathe in April. Not until the height of the summer."

"It'll be nearly May by the time she gets there, and she's only half-Italian. That ought to make her hardier."

"But—the Blue Dragon Tours office is in the Via Balbi, isn't it? Of course it wasn't there in my day. There wasn't all this travel for the masses. And for all most of them get out of it they might just as well stay in their own country."

"Jane *will* get something out of it," Mr. Graydon said gently.

"And I'd like to help people to understand what travelling can mean," said Jane.

"A very laudable desire, of course." And Jane gulped miserably. Her mother was not often sarcastic, but, just as she had expected, the very thought of Genoa was unwelcome.

"Oh, Mother, I didn't mean to sound smug——"

Giovanna Graydon sighed and cast her daughter an almost apologetic look.

"But the Lerrantes—their offices are in the Via Balbi. I can't—Jane can't——"

"A young clerk in a travel agency isn't at all likely to come into the slightest contact with the Lerrantes," said Rosemary crisply. "Oh, Aunt Giovanna, forgive me, but you aren't being fair to poor Jane."

Mrs. Graydon looked straight at her daughter.

"Do you want to go, Jane?"

Jane ran and dropped at her feet and took her hand in a very rare demonstrative gesture.

"Mother, I'd almost sell my soul to go! I shall die if you say no!"

"Of course you wouldn't," said her mother. And then suddenly her mood seemed to change and she said in quite a different voice: "Oh, well, I suppose I must agree, if you're really set on it. But on one condition, Jane dear. I want a promise."

"Anything," said Jane tersely. "Oh, Mother, I'll promise——"

"Well, it's very unlikely that you'll ever meet any of the Lerrantes, as Rosemary says, but if you do—then you must never tell them about me or who you are. It's to be a secret. In fact, you mustn't tell *anyone* out there."

"Oh, of course," said Jane. "I promise. But I shan't ever see them."

"You might, at least in the distance. Very well, then. And how soon will you be going?"

"Martha Longland is home on holiday. She's going back on the 29th," said Rosemary. "She works in the Genoa office and is a sensible enough person. Quite grown-up; about twenty-two or three. She'll take Jane back with her."

"Then we'll have to see about her clothes." And, once the decision had been made, Giovanna Graydon's manner was almost light-hearted.

Jane was thrilled and happy, but late that night, when her mother came into her room, she said abruptly:



"Mother, I wish you weren't so—so bitter about the Lerrantes."

"I'm not," said her mother. "At least I try not to be. But I've been cut off so completely for so long that I can't bear—well, they must have forgotten about me long ago. They could have looked me up. My father and brother were often in London. They have an office here, as you know. For the first year, at least, they could have found me, but they didn't try. They didn't care if I was dead. I *was* dead to them."

"But—but— it seems so queer to think that I've got a part of my family that I've never seen and shall never know!"

"It's not all that unusual."

"No, but—I've got a grandfather and——"

"Not a grandmother. She's dead. She died five years ago. I saw it in the London papers."

"Well, and an uncle and perhaps cousins——"

"Forget it, Jane, my dear. They move in a different world."

"I know, but——" Then Jane let it go at that. She climbed into bed and turned out the light, but she could not sleep for a long time. The future looked much too wonderful and exciting.

She had arranged with Rosemary to give in her notice the next day, and on the following Saturday morning, which happened to be her free one, she was to go and see the London manager of Blue Dragon Tours to discuss her salary and make final arrangements.

She was so happy that she bought herself a little bunch of violets for a button-hole and she actually ran up the stairs of the big building in Kingsway. Sally, already in the cloak-room, looked at her with astonishment.

"You're the most extraordinary girl!" she cried, staring at the violets and Jane's bright face. "Are you suddenly reconciled to the Silver Shell?"

"No. I'm giving in my notice. That's why——" And Jane hung up her hat and coat and smoothed her wind-blown hair.

"Ah-ha! A better job?"

"Yes, in Italy. In Genoa. My cousin's found it for me. I'm going on the 29th."

"Genoa?" Sally looked staggered. "Well, you were saying only yesterday that you wanted to travel. But—my boy friend used to know Genoa when he was in the Navy. He's often told me—it's a great, grim, dirty port. You might as well go to Liverpool or Glasgow. Better, really. They'd speak English!"

"Genoa isn't——" Jane flushed. "Well, it *is* a port, and slummy in places, but it's—— My mother comes from there."

"Oh sorry! It must be odd to have an Italian mother. I suppose she's very dark and flashing-eyed and temperamental?"

Jane thought of her mother's cool restraint and laughed.

"She's the least temperamental of beings. But then I don't think the Genoese are like the popular idea of Italians. I've heard it said that they're the Scotsmen of

Italy. The Northerners, you know. Not like people from Naples or Sicily."

"And you're going to live there—alone? My child, I'd sooner you than me!"

"Don't you want—adventures?"

"Not that sort. I'm getting married next year. We may live in Welwyn Garden City."

Jane gave it up, though she told herself, as she went rather nervously to request an interview with her boss, that perhaps she was very unnatural. So far marriage had scarcely entered her thoughts, though she supposed that she would want it one day. But before that time came she wanted to have done all sorts of things; known all sorts of people. Marriage was for such a long time—possibly a whole lifetime—that you might as well find yourself first and do some of the things that would be difficult, even impossible, when you had children of your own. Welwyn Garden City! But Sally would be happy.

That day and the next she honestly tried to concentrate on her work, but it was difficult, with so much to distract her thoughts. Her mother had already started to make her new nylon blouses and underwear, and there were lists to compile and all sorts of things to finish or settle.

On the Saturday morning she rather shyly entered the attractive office of the Blue Dragon Tours, but she was not shy for long with the manager, who was a kindly man and interested to find her so desperately anxious to go to Genoa. Everything was soon satisfactorily

arranged, and she went home carrying piles of Blue Dragon literature, for she would need to be absolutely familiar with every detail of their current list of tours, with the hotels they used and recommended, and with their prices. There were currency regulations, too, and she reminded herself on the way home that she must immediately start to study Italian in earnest. If only her mother would help her!

On the Sunday evening Rosemary came to supper and afterwards she said to Jane:

"Martha Longland came in yesterday morning after you left. I was busy and didn't see her, but apparently it's all fixed up and she'll meet you on the 29th at Victoria, in time for the Rome Express. I think you'll find her rather a queer fish, but she's all right if you keep on the right side of her."

"What do you mean?" asked Jane nervously.

"I don't quite know, to be honest. She's rather hard and hasn't much sense of humour, but she can be a good enough sort. She's fond of telling people that she's had to make her own way in the world. Left school at fifteen and so on, and hasn't any very close relatives. But you'll get on with her all right. She can help you a good deal if she likes you."

"And make things hard if she doesn't, I suppose? She sounds rather terrifying!" said Jane.

"No, she's not. She's pathetic, really. By the way, you'll get your tickets and reservations and things later, and you've got a passport, of course. You'll be travelling first class. The Blue Dragon people like their employees

to make a good show. There'll be labels for your luggage, and I'm afraid you'll have to wear the badge."

Jane laughed. She was familiar with the Blue Dragon brooch.

"Thoroughly labelled, in fact? But I shan't really mind. I believe I'd go if I had to cross the Channel in a dragon costume, scales and all!"

"What a sensation it would cause on the boat! The badge will be enough. I do hope you get on all right in Genoa."

Jane set her teeth.

"I'll see that I do—somehow. I don't expect it to be easy at first, but I won't come home after a month like that Maureen girl. Not unless I'm hopeless and they sack me."

As the days passed and the time for leaving London drew nearer she was very definitely nervous and suddenly uncertain of herself, but she did not confess to anyone. She had wanted to travel, to work abroad, and now that she had got her heart's desire it was too late to startfunking it.

Since she had been working she had bought herself some good clothes, and her grey coat and little hat would do well for travelling, worn with her scarlet suit. The weather in London had turned appallingly cold and dismal and it was likely to be very chilly during the crossing, at least.

She had several pretty summer frocks from the previous

year, as well as shorts and light sandals, and the nylon things that her mother was making so skilfully would be a help. Anything else she would need she could buy in Genoa and the thought gave her a thrill. Italian clothes would be so gay.

"How warm will it be in Genoa?" she asked once, and her mother said:

"It's hard to say. Perhaps quite cool, even cold, perhaps hot. The Genoese, at any rate, will still be wearing plenty of warm clothes. They don't shed them lightly!"

Once she had finished at the Silver Shell Jane had a few free days in which to get her clothes ready and pack. And in her spare time she pored over maps and railway time-tables, familiarizing herself—though she knew a good deal already—with Italy and the Italian railways. Bus and coach services, too. At least she would not arrive in the Via Balbi completely ignorant.

Then at last the morning of her departure came, and fortunately it was fine and sunny, though cold. She said good-bye to her father when he left for business, but her mother went with her to Victoria. She was rather disapproving of the Blue Dragon badge and the conspicuous labels.

"Still, they're sending you first class. I suppose that's something."

It was a good deal, Jane thought, remembering the price of even a second-class sleeper on the Rome Express. At the very thought of the sleeping-berths her stomach turned over. A night spent roaring across France, and

then, at eight o'clock in the morning, Genoa and the beginning of her new life!

She had been told to meet Martha Longland near the barrier, and there was no difficulty in picking out the Blue Dragon labels and badge. At first sight Martha Longland was small, fair and with rather pinched features. She wore a blue coat over a silver-grey suit and such extremely high heels that Jane felt a schoolgirl in her sensible low-heeled ones, though she had decided that they would be more comfortable for travelling.

Martha smiled in quite a friendly way when Jane introduced herself and her mother and for a moment her face looked younger and warmer. Giovanna Graydon murmured a few words and then kissed Jane hastily.

"I'll go now. Take care. I shall be thinking of you."

"Good-bye!" said Jane, and realized that the low heels were not the only schoolgirlish thing about her. For a moment she could have cried, for, after all, it was the first time she had ever left home for more than a week or two.

Martha said briskly:

"Where's your porter? Oh, there! Well, we may as well settle ourselves. There's quite a crowd travelling. This is always a busy train."

"People going to Rome!" said Jane, almost absently, though the thought gave her sharp pleasure.

"Yes. You look very young, I must say. Maurcen was twenty."

"I'm eighteen."

"We-ell, a child indeed! I hope you'll settle down all right."

"I hope to," said Jane and wished that she had not sounded so stiff, but already Martha was walking a little ahead, trying to catch up with the porters.

Martha said, when they were settled in their seats near the front of the train:

"What made them send you, I wonder? Not out of the London office, are you?"

"No, but my cousin Rosemary works there. I've always wanted a job with a travel agent."

"And now you've got it? Well, I don't call it exactly a lively life in the Via Balbi, but it's nice to be on the Riviera. I suppose you haven't any friends there?"

"Oh, no." That was true enough, though Jane wondered with wry amusement what Martha would think if she told her that she was related to the Lerrantes.

Martha nodded as though that was the end of it and settled herself more comfortably with her galaxy of magazines. Jane, who preferred books to magazines, had provided herself with several Penguins, but she did not feel like reading. It was too exciting, too satisfying, to be in a boat train again. It seemed a long, long time since she had been abroad. She had been sixteen the last time and she had spent ten never-to-be-forgotten days in Germany with the Sixth, walking in the Black Forest.

That other Jane seemed a stranger, almost. This Jane was a working woman, *not* a schoolgirl.

She glanced across at Martha and wondered if she was going to like her and how much they would be thrown

together. It would make all the difference if there was someone in the Genoa office with whom she had something in common. She longed to ask questions about the rest of the staff, but Martha was so evidently determined to read that Jane gave a little sigh and stared out at the last-minute arrivals.

Then she glanced at her labels and down at the little badge on her lapel. Under the auspices of the Blue Dragon. . . . A whole summer in Italy!

The train started with a series of jerks and they were off on the non-stop run to the coast.

THREE

Genoa

THEY REACHED PARIS AT ABOUT SEVEN O'CLOCK that evening, and by then everything seemed dreamlike to Jane. The evening sky was yellow and cold-looking behind the domes of Sacré Cœur.

"Brrr!" cried Martha, as they put on their coats and climbed down on to the platform to stretch their legs and get what glimpses of Paris life they could from the grey fastness of the Gare du Nord. "I never knew such icy April weather! I hope it's warmer when we get to Genoa."

"Was it warm when you left?"

"No, not very, but it's nearly May now." And Martha shrugged and set off up the platform, leaving Jane to wander on her own.

They had not talked very much so far. During the Channel crossing Jane had stood on deck, staring straight ahead to catch that first heart-lifting glimpse of France, but Martha had spent the entire time below in the first-class lounge, saying that it was too cold to be on deck, and that, in any case, she had made the journey too often to be interested.

Jane had hoped that she would never grow blasé about travel, and she had enjoyed every moment of that journey across the dark blue, wind-whipped Channel, chanting over and over to herself:

“The further off from England the nearer is to France——”

While they were eating a delicious lunch on the train Martha had talked at first, telling Jane the names of the other people who worked in the office in the Via Balbi, and about the house where she was going to live.

“It’s just behind the Stazione Principe, only higher. Genoa’s very hilly; all sorts of different levels. You’ll find it noisy at first, I suppose. Some people say it’s the noisiest city on earth. The Ursellos take a few young businessmen and girls. Very pleasant people. I’m next door. Our manager, Mr. Morrison, is nice, though he’s got one of those wailing wives. Doesn’t like Italy. The assistant manager is Italian and the other two in the office are men, both fairly young. Dick Billingly and Stephen Moorhouse.” Her tone had altered as she said the last name, and Jane was quick enough to realize, though a little of her attention was given to the exciting fact of eating her first meal on the Continent, that Martha had a warm spot for Stephen Moorhouse.

When they returned to the compartment for two that would later be transformed into a sleeper Martha had read again, and Jane had looked out in deep enchantment at the April loveliness of France. . . . The orchards soft and white with blossom, the brilliant spring green of

woodland, and the lovely groups of farm buildings in golden-grey stone.

And now they were in Paris and evening was drawing on. Jane felt chilly and unlike herself and a prey already to a certain homesickness. What, after all, if she did not make friends in Genoa? There would not be much choice in the office, and Martha obviously thought her hopelessly young and inexperienced. What if she made absurd mistakes? What if this rather frightening homesickness persisted?

"But it won't," Jane told herself, as she paced cautiously along the train. She had no wish to be left behind when the sleeping-cars were taken round the city to the Gare de Lyon. "It's just because I'm not used to going away from home for months and because I was too excited to sleep last night. When I get to Genoa it will be all right. I don't really need people. There'll be so much to see and explore."

Voluble porters constantly passed her and there were refreshment trolleys laden with bottles of wine, chocolate in gay packets, rolls and fruit. Some of the English travellers were buying food, all making rather a fuss about it and struggling with their francs, but Jane knew that she and Martha would be having dinner. Lunch had been superb and even homesickness had not taken away her appetite.

She turned and made her way back towards her own coach, and suddenly she noticed a girl just ahead—a slim, elegant girl, wearing a beautifully-cut suit and with a wisp of a hat on her shining dark hair. She was strolling

along with her face turned towards Sacré Cœur against the yellow sky.

"What a lovely figure!" Jane thought, as she quickened her pace. The engine had just given a warning whistle, though she could see the sleeping-car attendants still standing placidly on the platform.

Suddenly she saw a small, bright flash and something rolled a yard or two, coming to rest under a stationary truck. Jane dived for it and saw that it was a large silver brooch. On it was a beautifully-wrought design of oak leaves and an inscription in a language that was certainly not French or Italian.

"Welsh—no, Gaelic!" Jane said aloud, for she had a quick eye and ear for languages. She ran to catch up with the dark girl, who was just about to climb into the train.

"Excuse me! I think you dropped this."

The girl spun round and her hand went to her lapel. She was startlingly pretty, with dark eyes and a clear, slightly olive complexion.

"Oh, yes! My Cameron brooch, and it was a present just now. Oh, thank you very much!"

They smiled at each other.

"I *thought* it was Gaelic," said Jane.

"Yes. The language that they speak in the West of Scotland? I have been staying with some Camerons in London and this they gave me." The engine gave another whistle and Jane jumped.

"I must go. I'm in the next coach."

"You go to Rome?" the stranger asked.

"No, only to Genoa. I'm going to work there."

"Then, see! You can walk through from here. Your attendant has seen you. You are English and you go to work in Genoa. I am Italian and I would love to live in London for a time."

"I think I shall like being in Genoa," Jane said. The other girl was joined by a dark young man who looked like her brother, so she smiled and went off along the corridor towards the second coach.

Martha was looking out of the compartment.

"Oh there you are! I saw you getting in."

"That girl dropped her brooch, and it was a present. A Cameron clan badge, I think. Did you see her? Wasn't she pretty?"

Martha nodded.

"Yes. Yes, she's very attractive, if you like that dark type. But she's only a schoolgirl, of course. Well, seventeen or eighteen."

Jane laughed and she added:

"Well, I'm sorry. I forgot you're only eighteen. But she's rather a spoilt and pampered darling."

"She looked rich, but not spoilt. I thought her very jolly. Do you know her, then?"

"Not know. I've seen her quite a number of times, as well as other members of her family, and, as a matter of fact, she and her brother travelled to London when I did two or three weeks ago. All the Lerrantes seem to visit London quite a lot, but it's understandable because they've got offices there and probably friends, too. You won't know, but they're a very important Genoese

family and their shipping offices are in the Via Balbi not far from the Blue Dragon place."

Jane was staring at her with her mouth open, but Martha did not appear to notice.

"They've got a house on the Corso Aurelio Saffi and a villa at Camogli along the coast, so I'm told, and I've certainly seen them at Camogli. The little one's really the handsomest. I think she must be about eleven or twelve. She looks a spirited little creature, I must say."

"What—are their names?" Jane asked in a stifled voice, and Martha, who seemed to be losing interest, answered carelessly:

"I haven't a notion. They're really outside my ken."

Jane stood out in the corridor as the sleeping-coaches went very slowly round Paris to the Gare de Lyon. She scarcely saw the tall tenements, where washing hung from the windows, and the sudden glimpses of long boulevards and small squares meant little to her. She had a dim impression that Paris looked very grey on that cloudy evening and that here and there there were lilac trees in full flower. But most of her mind was absorbed with the astonishing fact that, even before she had set foot in Genoa, she had seen two members of the Lerrante family. She visualized the pretty, laughing face of the girl with the Cameron brooch and heard again her soft, attractive voice, speaking English a trifle stiltedly.

Her cousin? Well, it seemed like it. Her mother had had a brother and these might be his children. She wished now that she had taken a better look at the young man, but it had been only a passing glimpse. He had been of

medium height and dark, with a lean and quite good-looking face. Perhaps twenty-one or twenty-two. And Martha had mentioned a "little one". Jane found herself passionately curious to see the younger girl. She had never had a little sister; it would be fun to have a pretty, little cousin.

By the time the train had finally jolted its way into the Gare de Lyon Jane had told herself several times, with the utmost fierceness and resolution, that the Lerrantes were outside *her* ken, too, and likely to remain there. They were rich and she was quite poor. She was a working girl who had her way to make in Genoa. Above all, she had promised her mother never to tell the Lerrantes, or anyone else in Italy, that she was related to them.

At the time she had made the promise almost carelessly, even eagerly. For to make it paved her way to foreign travel; to the sort of life for which she had longed. Though she had sometimes been curious about her Italian relatives it had been almost an academic interest. She had never really expected to meet them face to face, to talk to one of them and find instant liking taking root in her heart.

"But I shall never speak to her again. I shall be like Martha—seeing them in the distance," she told herself, and firmly put the memory of that brief meeting behind her.

But when the train left Paris on its way south to Dijon, Turin, Genoa and Rome, and she and Martha went along to the brilliantly-lighted dining-car, the two Lerrantes were there, several tables away, and she could

see the girl's animated face, though only the back of her brother's head and the line of his smooth brown neck.

Already it was growing dark outside and the sense of being in a dream was greater than ever. France was outside the long windows, and in the night, probably before the early dawn, they would have roared through the Mont Cenis tunnel into the unknown land of Italy.

But when she glanced back at Martha, Jane came to earth a little. There was something very real about Martha; nothing romantic, or dreamlike, or even very attractive. She was looking tired, which made her small, rather pale face look shrunken. But she had a certain assurance and the waiters readily obeyed her quick, idiomatic French. Jane herself scarcely spoke a word, though her own French was good enough. She had worked hard at it at school, and had kept it up as an extra subject at her commercial college, as well as listening to French stations on the radio and going to French films. But she was shy of airing it, for some reason, perhaps because Martha had critical eyes.

When they went back to their compartment the berths were made up and Martha, calmly and without comment, chose the top one and told Jane that she would wash first and get into bed out of the way. So Jane lingered in the corridor, feeling homesick again and extremely sleepy, for she had shared a bottle of red wine with Martha and the meal had been heavy.

At the end of the corridor the attendant sat and filled in papers, but suddenly he looked up and winked cheerfully at her. At that moment Martha called out that she

was ready and Jane stifled a vast yawn as she went back into the warm, confined space and began to wash and get ready for the night.

Jane slept soundly all night long, undisturbed by the rattle and roar of the train. When she awoke it was half-past six, as she could see by the illuminated dial of her watch, so they must be through the tunnel and past Turin.

Through the drawn blind she could see a sparkle of sunlight and immediately she was filled with regret because she had missed the snow-covered Alps and a glimpse of one of Northern Italy's greatest cities.

She began to dress as quietly as possible in the narrow space, then swilled her face and hands and prepared to go out into the corridor to see what there was to be seen. From the top berth Martha said, sounding sleepy and cross:

"What on earth are you doing? It's not time to get up!"

Jane muttered something soothing and quietly opened the door. Martha had probably arrived in Italy innumerable times, but this was her very first time and the moment held a thrill. She shut the door behind her and found the corridor deserted, even by the attendant. Some of the blinds were down, but just in front of her the window was clear and she gasped at the sight of the sunlit scene.

The morning was blue and faintly misty and there were no great snow-peaks in sight. Somehow she had expected an exotic landscape, but, beyond the fact that here and there were groups of pink and yellow-washed buildings, and a little coloured church with a belfry, there was nothing very startling about it. The fields looked rather bare

and wintry and the trees looked surprisingly wintry too. But when they tore through a small station the name on a long board was patently an Italian one, and the clean, bare landscape had a certain charm.

The train rocked on at a great speed and Jane let her body move gently with it as she stared out into the brightness of the morning. She felt wide awake and fresh and the homesickness of the night before had receded. It was all fun; it was going to be the most interesting, the most wonderful thing that had ever happened to her!

She was hungry and thirsty, but she knew that there was no hope of breakfast until they reached Genoa, so she continued to lean there, as villages and towns flashed past and gradually a range of blue mountains loomed up to the south-east. The Maritime Alps!

Soon after half-past seven she cautiously opened the door again and saw that Martha was washed and dressed, but still looking sleepy. Jane went in and powdered her face and put on some lipstick, then packed her small case ready for leaving the train.

"We'll leave the luggage to be sent up," said Martha. "I'll just drop you at the Ursellos' and after breakfast you'd better come along with me to the office. They probably won't expect you to start this morning, but you can meet everyone and Mr. Morrison will want to see you."

By the time they were ready the mountains were much nearer and the fields were giving place to a long succession of mainly industrial buildings. Then, promptly at

eight o'clock, the train pulled up in the Stazione Principe in Genoa.

"Genova! Genova!" shouted a porter, as they climbed down on to the platform.

The two Lerrantes seemed to be the only other people leaving the train, as Jane saw with some surprise.

"Everyone going on to Rome," said Martha, signalling to a porter who came up with a rush. She spoke rapidly in Italian and he said "Si, si!" a number of times and smiled in a friendly way.

"He'll bring them up," said Martha. "Come along, then."

It was cold on the station and Jane saw that the people who were arriving on the far platform looked extremely well wrapped up. But when they reached the impressive exit she was dazzled and half-blinded by the glare of the sun. The noise from the great Piazza Acquaverde was considerable. Workmen had part of the road up and were using a drill, trolley-buses in dozens swung round the statue of Christopher Columbus and off to their various destinations, and there were crowds of people everywhere.

The moment, though so noisy and bright, was part of the dream that had held her off and on since leaving Victoria—that first moment of arrival in an unknown country, when the sound and smell and atmosphere are an almost unbelievable shock.

Martha, after one glance at Jane's face, took her arm and said not unkindly:

"Wake up or you're sure to get run over! The traffic

here's the very dickens and you'll have to give it your whole attention. Don't you want your breakfast? Because I do. Trains always give me a headache and I'm dying for a cup of coffee."

• "So am I," agreed Jane and managed to get her eyes into focus and make her legs obey her. They set off briskly to the right, along the front of the station, and then down a road beside it. Jane heard the sound of a ship's siren and smelt the tang of the sea on the fresh breeze. At the corner she got a glimpse of great ships and blue water, but Martha hurried her mercilessly along and presently led the way up a steep incline on the other side of the railway line. Across the road in front of them were some tall, cream-washed houses, and behind and above them rose tiers and tiers of further buildings, pale and dazzling under the brilliant sky. A good deal of Genoa, in fact, seemed to hang in the air.

"Here we are. If you're lucky you'll get a front window, but it will be frightfully noisy." Martha hurried Jane up some steps and, pressing a bell in passing, entered a dark, cool, spotlessly clean hall. Almost at once a smiling little woman appeared. She was plump and pleasant-looking, and, after exchanging a few words in Italian with Martha, she seized Jane's hand in a friendly grip.

"Ah, so you are the little English girl I expect? Welcome to Genoa! You speak no Italian, yes?"

"A little," said Jane, who had, in fact, fully understood the exchange of words between Signora Ursello and Martha Longland.

"Ah, that is good. It will help. You wish to see your room and then breakfast? Breakfast in the room, perhaps? That will be best. And the baggage——?"

"It'll be along soon. I'm going now. I'll collect you later." And Martha nodded to Jane and Signora Ursello and went off with short, purposeful steps.

Jane followed Signora Ursello up a bare, clean staircase and then up another, narrower one into a long yellow-washed passage. The woman, panting a little, turned to smile, with her hand on a doorknob.

"I put you front. It is noisy and some wish to be back. But back I have not now, though perhaps later——"

"I don't think I'll mind," said Jane, and was shown into a small, bright room, with cream walls, a single bed, a table covered with an extremely white cloth, and a fitted wash-basin in one corner. Along one wall were some hooks, and there was a small mirror over the table, which was evidently to do duty as a dressing-table, in the manner of many continental hotels. But it was as clean as the rest of the house and the morning sun was flooding in.

"Thank you. It's very nice," Jane said shyly, and Signora Ursello looked pleased.

"You like? Good! Then I send Brigita up with rolls and coffee." Suddenly she put her head on one side and studied the English girl closely. "My dear, you are very young! More young than that poor Maureen who did not like our beautiful Italy."

"I'm eighteen," said Jane, seeing in the mirror that she looked a good deal less, for she had not put on much make-up and her hair was soft and untidy.

“So young! Then I must look after, si? Young people I like. My husband and I, we lose our only son in the war.” Then, without waiting for comment, she nodded, smiled again, and hurried out, shutting the door behind her.

Jane immediately went to the window and gave a little gasp. It was not a beautiful view, but it was an interesting and lively one and bathed in that lovely sunlight. Just below, traffic swung past in a never-ending stream, with the trolley-buses swinging their great lengths at amazing speed round a steep corner. There was a tangle of railway lines disappearing into the Stazione Principe, and beyond them trees, a big building that Jane knew from her careful perusal of a map of Genoa must be the Palazzo Doria, and then the blue waters of the vast docks, where the funnels of ships made bright splashes of colour.

As she stood there a young girl arrived with a tray, which she put down on the table. Jane thanked her shyly in Italian, and, the moment she had gone, she drew the table nearer the window and began eagerly on her first Italian breakfast.

As her teeth sank hungrily into the crisp roll she looked down at the traffic and the ships. So Jane Graydon, daughter of Giovanna Lerrante, was in Genoa, and Jane Graydon meant to stay there!

Nothing, nothing, thought Jane, as she poured herself a second cup of coffee, was going to send her away. She was not going to be another “poor Maureen”, that was certain.

FOUR

The Spell of the Lerrantes

JANE'S LUGGAGE ARRIVED JUST WHEN SHE HAD finished her breakfast and was carried upstairs by a small, dark, friendly man, who said at once:

"Good morning! I am Sandro Ursello; always called Sandro, you understand. I would wish that you do also."

"Oh—thank you," said Jane, very shyly.

"We are very friendly here. My wife is Alisa. She would not like that you call her Signora. It was a good breakfast?"

"It was wonderful!" said Jane.

"Ah, good. Now I leave you to unpack." He smiled and went quickly away, and, with a warm feeling in her heart, Jane turned to find her keys. Certainly she seemed to have come to a pleasant place, both clean and homely. She remembered the son who had been killed in the war and understood, at least in part, the sad look behind the smiling, worn face of Sandro Ursello. Evidently the couple really did like young people.

She disposed of her possessions and the room soon had a more individual touch. She was just washing her face

and putting on fresh make-up when, with the briefest of knocks, Martha walked in.

"Oh, you're more or less settled! Think you'll like it?"

"I think so," Jane said, applying a clear scarlet lipstick carefully.

"My place is just as clean. The Italians have a very high standard of cleanliness, in spite of the popular English idea. You'd better put a coat on. It's still chilly, though it'll be quite hot later."

Jane grabbed up her handbag and gloves and followed her down the two flights of stairs. Out in the sun, walking briskly back towards the station, she said diffidently:

"I'm sorry if I'm a nuisance. It's very nice of you to bother."

Martha raised her fair eyebrows.

"No trouble. And you'll soon be able to stand on your own feet. If you can't you've no business to come abroad at all."

Her tone was less damping than her words, but she was certainly not a very warm person and it was clear to Jane that she could not expect any great friendliness from Martha Longland. All the same, Martha was the only person she could question at all about her new life.

"I'm sure I can. I think I'm fairly sensible. As you say, I'll need to be. But—but you must have been strange here yourself once. How did it strike you? What ought I to do and not do?"

Martha raised her eyebrows for the second time.

"I've been here nearly four years. At first I was in the

London office, and I went to Paris for a few months when I was eighteen. I've always stood on my own feet since I was fifteen and left school. Oh, I don't know. You'll soon get to know people, though Genoa's like any other big city. One's inclined to be anonymous. As for 'don'ts', I can't think of any, except mind what you eat at first. Sometimes a change of climate and the sort of food you're not used to are rather upsetting. And have a bit of sense and don't wander about near the port or in the old quarters late in the evening. That would apply to any other city as well, I suppose. The modern part's all right. You must know. You wouldn't go wandering about Soho in the evening. There are thieves and unpleasant characters everywhere, but far more pleasant ones."

"Yes," Jane agreed. "Do you—do you like Genoa?"

Martha paused and real warmth came into her voice.

"I love it. I have from the first moment. There's so much going on; so much to see always. If I must be a working girl I'd sooner work here than anywhere else on earth. And even if——" She stopped abruptly, glancing down at Jane's left hand.

"You're not engaged?"

"No," said Jane. "I haven't any boy friends. I don't think I want to marry for a long time yet."

"All women want to marry," Martha retorted brusquely, and Jane was silent, thinking of Sally Taylor and Welwyn Garden City. Once again she thought she must be very unnatural.

After that they talked little as they walked briskly round one side of the Piazza Acquaverde, where the

trolley-buses still swung round in an unending stream, and the drill still filled the air with raucous sound. Up above the Square, buildings rose in white and palely coloured tiers to a great height and the whole scene was divided into sunlight and deep, cool shadow.

"The Via Balbi," said Martha, when they had walked on for a little distance. "It narrows very much at the end, and the other famous street, the Via Garibaldi, is just a narrow, dark tunnel lined with the most magnificent palaces. Here we are at the Blue Dragon!" She stopped for a moment in front of a window and indicated the Blue Dragon sign above it. Posters were displayed; a beautiful one of that glorious group of buildings—Baptistry, Cathedral and Leaning Tower—at Pisa, and several of resorts along the Riviera coast.

"Oh, well, come on! I'll take you to Mr. Morrison."

The outer office was cool and pleasant, with one or two small tables laden with travel literature, blue leather arm-chairs, and flowers in wall brackets. But Jane scarcely had time to take it in, for Martha turned to two men behind the counter. It was still early and they had no customers. The older one was turning over papers under a sign that said "Reservations", and the younger one, a fair, good-looking young man, was ticking off names on a list.

"This is Dick Billingly, Jane, and this Stephen Moorhouse. Jane Graydon, who's going to work here," Martha said briefly.

They greeted Jane in friendly fashion, and then Stephen said to Martha:

"Did you have a good holiday?"

"It was all right, but I'm glad to be back. There isn't much to keep me in England," Martha said, smiling into his hazel eyes, and Jane thought fleetingly:

"She likes him, and no wonder. He's very nice looking and has an intelligent face."

But then Martha whisked her into a passage and knocked on a door. When it was opened a middle-aged man was revealed, writing at a laden desk.

"I've brought Jane Graydon, Mr. Morrison."

"Oh, good morning, Martha. Nice to see you back again. And this is Miss Graydon? How do you do, my dear?"

Jane looked into his rather tired, kindly face and felt sure that she would like him.

"How do you do, Mr. Morrison?"

"I hope you'll be very happy with us. I hear that you've been longing to have a job abroad. Well, you've just come at the right time, for we're starting to be busy and we're still shorthanded, even with Martha back. The assistant manager, Signor Manazzo, is ill, as Miss Longland may have told you. The first Blue Dragon tour comes out on Saturday and after that there'll be no end to it until September. Still, we won't expect you to work the moment you set foot in Genoa. How would you like to explore this morning and come back after lunch? Then Mr. Billingly or Miss Longland will give you some idea of your work."

"I'd like that!" Jane said fervently. She knew that she would never settle down to work with Genoa still almost unseen.

"All right, then. Don't get lost. Have you got a map of the city?"

"Oh, yes, thank you. In my handbag."

"Well, have a look round and some lunch and come back at two. We don't actually open again till three. Have you some Italian money?"

"Yes. The London office got me some lire."

"Then you're all fixed up. I hope you'll like Genoa."

"I'm sure I shall."

He gave her a searching, very shrewd look.

"I believe you will. It's a wonderful city."

As she went back to the outer office Jane remembered that Martha had said that his wife wasn't happy in Genoa. Perhaps that accounted for his tired face.

Martha had disappeared to take off her outdoor clothes and Jane found the two men still without customers. Stephen Moorhouse smiled at her in a very friendly way.

"It'll all seem strange at first, but we aren't a bad lot to work with, in spite of that little idiot, Maureen. I suppose you heard that she went home in less than a month? She never had any sense, anyway. She couldn't have got herself from London to Southend, let alone cope with continental time-tables."

"I love them," Jane said, smiling back.

"My child, you'll need to. Our life hangs on time-tables of one kind and another. Time-tables and hotels. Are you going out to explore? Not starting work yet?"

"After lunch, Mr. Morrison said."

"He's no slave-driver. Very nice to work for, as you'll find. See you later, then!"

"Yes," said Jane, and, with a feeling of high excitement, stepped out alone and free into the Via Balbi once again.

After walking a short distance down the street she found herself by the entrance to one of the great palaces, the Palazzo Reale. She had read that most of the old palaces were now used as office buildings, but this still managed to look elegant. She stepped hesitantly into the cool stone hall and then out into a small garden beyond a wrought iron gate, where there were beds of purple and yellow pansies and a fountain played. On three sides rose the graceful arches and walls of the palace, glowing, a warm ochre, in the sun, but on the fourth side there was a balustrade.

When she went to lean on the warm stone she looked straight down at the bright awnings of market stalls and at the noise and bustle of the road that curved round the port. It was a startling contrast from quietness and grace to the business and squalor of the dock-side street, and she stood there for a long time. Genoa! It was real. It must be real. And yet she knew that it would be some time before it was entirely real to Jane Graydon.

Her mind turned again to the Lerrantes and, leaving the Palazzo Reale, she went on down the cool, deep street until she came to another palace, the Palazzo Cordoni. Within its shadowy courtyard a board with gilt letters announced that these were the offices of the Lerrante shipping firm.

There was no garden this time, though another fountain played, sending down a tinkling shower of drops on to the old worn stone.

Jane was wondering if she ought to be there, when a small party of tourists turned in under the archway and stood grouped by the fountain, while their guide discoursed in German on the history of the palace, waving his hands at the splendid pillars and the carvings above the main door. So evidently it was all right.

They went off, after taking some photographs, but Jane still lingered in a corner, half-hidden behind a pillar. And, while she stood there, a big turquoise blue car turned in with some difficulty from the narrow street and drew up outside the great door that led to the Lerrante offices. A uniformed chauffeur leaped out to open the car door and an old man climbed slowly out. He had white hair and a stern, much-lined face, and, even though he looked so infirm, he had an air of command. He spoke to the chauffeur, asking him to return in an hour, and Jane knew quite enough Italian to understand that.

"Si, si, Signor Lerrante," said the man deferentially, and the old man went slowly up the shallow steps to the main entrance.

Jane leaned against the pillar, feeling suddenly sick with awareness. She watched the rather grim old man move out of sight into the building and the big car slide carefully out into the endless stream of traffic. The fountain tinkled on and she went towards it and dabbled her hot fingers in the carved basin.

So that was her grandfather! That aristocratic-looking, but obviously ailing old man! That was the man who had been hard enough to cut himself off entirely from his only

daughter because she had fallen in love with a young and rather poor Englishman.

She supposed that she ought to hate him, and yet her only clear emotion was a passionate curiosity, a curiosity so intense that she was quite startled.

Walking very fast indeed, she made her way to the Piazza Caricamento down by the port, a shabby, palely coloured square of old peeling buildings, and there caught a tram that, she was pretty sure, would take her to the sea. The tram rattled and rocked along and she stood swaying with its motion, jammed in by old men and elderly women, the latter mostly with enormous market baskets. It was hot and a trifle smelly, but soon the blue Mediterranean was on the right, instead of the palings and warehouses that had hidden the docks.

"Corso Aurelio Saffi!" the conductor said in her ear, and she pushed her way out, suddenly dazzled by the sun and refreshed by the salty breeze.

The Corso Aurelio Saffi was a wide thoroughfare, along which traffic poured in an unending stream. There were villas and flats on the one side and on the other, far below, a sandy beach and then the limitless Mediterranean, shining and blue, though perhaps not so blue as she had always imagined it would be.

She sat on the top of the wall, with her hair blowing gently, and went back to her recent thoughts in the courtyard of the Palazzo Cordoni. She had promised not to tell anyone about her relationship with the Lerrantes. She knew that her mother had thought there was really little chance of her ever even seeing them, and already she

had seen two of her cousins and her grandfather. Pretty certainly, anyway.

"I will forget them! I *must* forget them!" Jane said aloud, frowning fiercely at the dazzling water and at a ship trailing a cloud of smoke far out. But immediately on that came the memory of Martha's words. The Lerrantes had a house on the Corso Aurelio Saffi. She had genuinely not remembered that until this moment; it had been merely that her map had told her it was the nearest point to the sea.

Guiltily, half-angry with herself, she waited for a brief lull in the traffic and crossed the road. And, after walking only a hundred yards or so, she found it—turquoise blue gates with "Villa Lerrante" on each ornate post. She stood there gazing into a garden that was lovely with lilac, wistaria and early roses. The house was some way back, but she could see that it was big, with turquoise shutters and window-boxes.

"Come on!" she told herself sternly. "You're behaving like a kid standing outside fairyland."

But just as she was about to move she saw that someone had appeared on a distant lawn—a child with curly dark hair, who was wearing a primrose yellow frock. She was playing with a small black poodle, tossing a blue ball for the dog to chase.

Jane gave herself a shake and turned her back on the attractive picture. If that was her youngest cousin she was just as pretty as the older sister; more so, really, as Martha had said.

Telling herself that it was just no use growing any more

wistful or curious, Jane glanced at her map and set off briskly again. She had come to Genoa to work and not to dream impossible dreams. She suddenly visualized her mother's face and once more felt guilty.

FIVE

Tickets and Time-Tables

JANE FOUND HER WAY PRESENTLY THROUGH A tangle of ancient and decidedly smelly streets to the modern Piazza de Ferrari, where the Opera House stood and a great fountain sent up a silver cloud of spray in the centre.

Her main impression in the older streets was that the poorer Genoese must have a passion for washing clothes, for from every tenement window, and hanging in fantastic festoons across the narrow thoroughfares, was every imaginable garment.

No one paid any attention to her as she passed slowly along, and, the Lerrantes almost forgotten, she absorbed the changing atmosphere of the great city eagerly, feeling that never before had she been wholly alive. Particularly fascinating was the little square before the church of San Matteo, where the once magnificent palaces had grown worn and shabby and the narrow alley-ways cut up steeply into places more remote.

From the Piazza de Ferrari the Via XX Settembre stretched impressively, and she took the same delight

in the wonderful modern shops as she had taken in the shadowed alley-ways and the grubby, absorbed children.

She bought some vivid postcards and a number of stamps, and, growing bold, ventured into a shop and chose a scarlet and green scarf. Just briefly, on that first morning, she felt on holiday. Soon would come work and perhaps difficulties, but meanwhile everything was before her.

Undoubtedly it would all have been more fun with a congenial companion, someone with whom she could have commented and questioned. But she told herself that it was no good even thinking about that. Martha was unlikely ever to be congenial, and the Lerrantes were as remote as though there was a thick wall of glass between herself and them. It was Jane Graydon alone in Genoa.

"And Jane Graydon coping perfectly well," she said to herself, as she found the correct trolley-bus without much difficulty and was borne back towards the Piazza Acquaverde at lunch-time.

She was a little disconcerted to find that she shrank from entering a *ristorante* alone. *Trattorie* were, of course, cheaper—she knew that—and within a short time she would definitely have to eat in the cheapest possible places, since meals were expensive in Italy.

The workers of Genoa were streaming out of offices and shops and most tables seemed to be filling up rapidly. She tossed back her hair, assumed an air of the greatest possible assurance, and seated herself at a table on the

pavement. It was in the sun and was backed by a line of shrubs in scarlet pots. The menu, brought by a smiling waiter, was formidable, but she had enough Italian to choose and ask for a simple meal. Soup, an omelette with fried potatoes, a roll and butter.

Afterwards she walked the hundred yards or so to the Blue Dragon office and stood for a moment outside, suddenly shy and nervous. The office was still closed, and would remain so until three o'clock, but Stephen Moorhouse was writing at the counter and he grinned at her and let her in.

"Well, how goes it? Did you find your way all right and get a decent lunch?"

"Yes—to both," Jane said, deciding that he had a very nice face. He looked healthy and kind—an uncomplicated sort of person, which was a relief after her impressions of Martha.

"Good!" Then he took another look at her. "That sounds better than Maureen, who would scarcely venture out of doors without one of us to hold her hand. Can't think how they ever came to send her here, or why she agreed. Still, you'll find it lonely at first. Ask me anything you want to know. Or Dick or Martha, of course."

"Thank you," said Jane, really grateful. "Martha's been—very kind."

"Martha's all right," he said casually. "Mr. Morrison and the others aren't back yet, so I'd look round, if I were you. That's where we do the train reservations—along at the end. It'll fall to you sometimes, perhaps, when

you get more experienced. How's your Italian, by the way?"

"Fair. I can understand a lot more than I can speak. But my French is quite fluent."

"Any German?"

"Not much. Enough to make myself understood over *some* things."

"It's a help. We mostly deal with British travellers, but a lot of Germans are coming to Italy and they occasionally wander in. I'd pick up what you can. And we sometimes arrange for Italians to go to Britain, though they most often go to the bigger agencies. In fact, we get all sorts. Some know where they want to go; some haven't a clue. Some hate Italy. Some hate the hotel rooms we've booked for them. Some think they're being rooked, but usually they're not. Generally speaking the Italians are as honest as most people and hotel keepers only want to please. By the time you've been here three months you'll either think that humanity as a whole is wonderful or you'll be convinced that everyone is mad or hard to please. You take your choice!"

Jane laughed.

"Which did you choose?"

He laughed, too.

"Oh, I like 'em on the whole. Sometimes, of course, I could cheerfully duck them in the docks or advise them to go to Margate next year. But I enjoy it all—even the madness—and most people *do* love Italy. Myself I'm all for individual travel. I could never have been led by the nose. I started coming when I was seventeen, before I left

school. With a rucksack and not much money, you know—wandering. Going to the remote places as well as the great cities.”

“It’s the way I’d like,” Jane agreed thoughtfully, absently turning over a pile of brightly coloured leaflets depicting Riviera resorts.

“Most young people like it that way, and some older ones. Once you’ve been free in foreign countries you rarely turn to being conducted.”

“Then—how do you really feel about the tours?”

“Oh, they’re necessary. I enjoy helping to make them efficient; seeing that people see all they can and get the maximum enjoyment. Older people who’ve never been abroad before, people travelling alone, all the endless timid ones—I like ’em to learn to swear by the Blue Dragon. More people than ever before have the money to come abroad and if they’re happy the first time they learn confidence, and it’s not unusual for people who come on a tour one year to come back with a friend the next year, just getting their tickets and perhaps lists of hotels through the Blue Dragon. There were a couple of young women yesterday. They came with us last year. This year they’ve just booked to Genoa and now they’re wandering off with one of the railway holiday tickets. Just getting off where they feel like and choosing any hotel that appeals to them. It’s easy this time of year.”

“Can they speak Italian?”

“About fifty words, but they’ll get by. You can get yourself round any country on ‘Please’ and ‘Thank you’ and ‘Can you tell me the way to the railway station?’

Oh, and 'I'd like a cheap room for one night, two nights.' You know the idea?"

"Until you're in trouble, I suppose. Lose your luggage, or get struck down with appendicitis."

"Even then gestures or a phrase book will do a lot and people always flock to help. Well, I'd better get on. Here's Mr. Morrison back, and there's Martha crossing the street."

Jane began to tidy the racks of pamphlets and brilliant folders, her thoughts very busy. Life sounded as though it was going to be extremely interesting, as interesting as she had always supposed. Stephen's views interested her and so did the young man himself. She liked the way he talked about people and appreciated his easy tolerance.

Martha came over to her, her face a little sharp.

"How did you get on? Have you been back long?"

"Oh, very well, really. And I haven't been back long. Ste—Mr. Moorhouse has been talking to me about the Blue Dragon." Then Jane realized that it was probably the wrong thing to say. Every instinct told her that Martha liked Stephen Moorhouse and that she had a jealous nature.

But Martha merely said, "Oh, really?" and went to take off her coat.

Presently Jane found herself unpacking parcels of pamphlets and listing them in an inner room. They attracted her so much that she had to force herself to hurry over the task. The places they dealt with looked so very inviting. Camogli, Portofino, Santa Margherita, Rapallo, Sestri Levante, Levanto, Monte Rosso. . . . How

soon could she see some of them? Camogli looked altogether delightful, with its picturesque little harbour filled with brightly coloured boats and its pale, worn skyscraper houses rising in tiers under a blue sky. The sound of it had always attracted her and it was really very near.

Once or twice she stopped altogether to tell herself that it was all true and not a dream. She was working for the Blue Dragon in Genoa and, unless things went very wrong, she would be there until September. By then Genoa would be familiar and perhaps the Riviera coast as well. Then there were the Lerrantes—but, at that, she shut her mind resolutely. It was no use thinking of the Lerrantes.

Later she was sent into the outer office to replenish the stocks of railway tickets, and once more, as she dealt with the little pieces of cardboard, her imagination took wing. Pisa, Florence, Civitavecchia, Rome, Naples . . . the whole of Italy seemed under her fingers.

After a time she found Mr. Morrison at her side.

“Miss Graydon, I’d spend the rest of today observing behind the counter. It will help you to get a grasp of things.”

Jane nodded and found the next hour very fascinating. Dick Billingly was dealing with train reservations, both seats and sleepers. Stephen Moorhouse was handing out train tickets and Martha was on “General Inquiries”. Martha’s task was really the most interesting, Jane thought, and she deeply admired her knowledge and keen grasp of requirements. Nothing seemed to stump her, and she answered as readily in Italian, French or German

as in English. Bewildered people looked less puzzled, anxious ones relieved.

As the afternoon passed there was quite a queue waiting to make inquiries and Martha began to look hot and tired.

"I'm never at my best after an overnight journey," she muttered to Jane. "Look here, can't you take one or two? But I suppose not. You can't know——"

"I could look up trains," Jane said diffidently.

Martha gave her a sceptical look.

"*Can* you?" A minute later, however, she handed over a harassed-looking middle-aged woman who wanted to go to Rome by the fastest train the next morning, and also required to know how she was to get to Perugia from Rome.

"There are the time-tables. Have a shot, will you?" Martha said in a low voice, and Jane took up the thick, closely printed booklet with slightly trembling fingers. How often she had looked up trains and connections just for pleasure, but now it seemed different, with Martha's expression still rather sceptical.

All the same, she did love time-tables and there was no difficulty over the Rome train. The best was the one they had left that very morning, though already it seemed days ago. Perugia was more difficult, since it turned out to involve two changes at places she had scarcely heard of, but she wrote down the times, explaining carefully to the woman.

When she had finished she found that Mr. Morrison was standing just behind her. He was smiling.

“Good, Miss Graydon! You certainly aren’t afraid of time-tables, and that was all perfectly correct.”

Jane glowed. It was a small triumph, but nevertheless it sent her spirits soaring. She had sped her first customer on a journey and it gave her immense satisfaction.

SIX

Stephen

SHE WAS GROWING TIRED BY THE END OF THE afternoon, but her keenness was mounting. As she went to get her coat she vowed that she would somehow make herself as efficient as the others. As efficient as Martha.

"Though it will take some time," she thought. "I've a frightful lot to learn."

Mr. Morrison smiled at her when they met in the passage.

"If I can help you at all, Miss Graydon, don't hesitate to tell me so. My wife, too—though of course she's rather delicate. Unfortunately the climate doesn't suit her, especially in summer. Still, I know she'll want you to visit us soon. After all, so young a girl . . . and in a foreign city. . . . But you seem a sensible young woman."

"I hope I am," Jane said, liking his rather worn and anxious face. "If my parents hadn't been sure of me I don't think they'd ever have let me come, Mr. Morrison."

"Quite right. But cities can be lonely places. I hope you soon make friends."

When Jane emerged into the outer office she found that Martha had gone and so had Stephen Moorhouse. She smiled rather wryly, wondering where the friends were to come from, then told herself that it didn't matter really. She had her heart's desire and was in Italy, with a job that was likely to be ten times more interesting than insurance.

She was only to have breakfast at the Ursellos', so all other meals must be taken in restaurants. Martha had mentioned that there were one or two very near to where they lived. But just at the moment she desperately needed a cup of tea. It was shamefully English of her to feel like that, especially as they had all had one before the office opened to the public, but it couldn't be helped. She went back to the place where she had had her lunch and ordered a pot of tea, knowing that it would be weak and expensive but not caring. After all, it was her first day and there was still a trace of the holiday feeling!

Refreshed, she climbed the hill to the Ursellos' and was dismayed and disconcerted to find that the evening before her loomed long and certainly lonely. It was obviously impossible to appeal to Martha for company.

"I'm tired," she told herself. "I shan't feel like this when I've had a good night's sleep. I'll change, and go out for a meal, then go to bed early."

Half an hour later she left her rather bare but pleasant room, and, passing only two young women who were chattering animatedly in Italian, went out into the sun again. By then it was very warm and she had abandoned her coat in favour of a white cardigan.

She stood at the corner, hesitating, wondering whether to do a little more sight-seeing before eating, when she saw a familiar figure. Stephen Moorhouse was coming towards her, his hair slightly lifted by the breeze from the harbour.

He smiled at sight of her and gave her a friendly salute. His eyes seemed appreciative as he looked at her and Jane flushed faintly. She was delighted to see any known face, but soon he would be gone again. Probably he was going to meet Martha.

However, it seemed that she was wrong.

"Matter of fact I was on my way to look for you. It struck me that you might be abominably lonely on your first evening."

Jane felt a warm rush of gratitude.

"How awfully nice of you! I *was* lonely and feeling rather ashamed of myself because of it. I've wanted to see Genoa so much, and it seemed frightful to feel——"

"Most places look better in company. If you like I'll take you to where you'll have a splendid view and get a good meal into the bargain."

They set off together, their steps matching well, for Jane was a fast walker. Stephen had changed into well-worn flannels and a dull blue jacket and his manner was easy and companionable.

"Where are we going?" Jane asked, when they had been walking for several minutes, and he grinned.

"You'll see. Honestly you'll like it."

Presently they reached what seemed to be a tiny, dim

station in the heart of the city and Jane gave a little gasp of pleasure.

"Oh, the Righi! Yes, I'll love that. My mother——" She stopped, dismayed.

. But Stephen was rooting in his pocket for money and had not observed her dismay.

"Does your mother know Genoa?"

"She—she was here once, but it's years ago. I've heard of the Righi." It was going to be difficult not to mention her mother's connection with Genoa, she could see.

They took their places in the funicular and very soon the little car began to jerk its way steeply upwards. Steep little streets, sun-drenched steps, and the many tiers of houses began to drop behind them, but there were still more and more tiers of buildings, and an occasional high church, above. Half-way up they changed to another car and went on again. Jane wondered if Stephen expected her to be nervous, for he glanced at her often, but she had been in even more startling trains in Germany and Switzerland and, in any case, had a good head for heights.

At the top she leaped cheerfully out, eager to see what was to be seen. The sun was already beginning to sink and the light was turning softly blue.

"View first, dinner afterwards?" Stephen asked, and, when she nodded, they set off rapidly up the road. On their right was a wide view of high bare mountains and the peculiar stone fortifications that encircled Genoa, but at first there was no view on their left. But soon they were high above the buildings that clung to the hill's edge and Jane gasped.

"Higher still, before you look!" cried Stephen, and they hurried on to where they could perch on a wall, looking at the stupendous view.

Far below lay Genoa, a jumble of buildings and spires and curving roads, and then the vast outspread docks and shipyards. Beyond was the sea, its blueness faintly dimmed in the light of the lowering sun.

"Oh, it's wonderful!" Jane stared and stared and then focused her gaze nearer at hand, at the high blossoming orchards and the wild flowers in the short grass. "It's so big! One can see for miles."

"It's not very clear, though. Along there, beyond the shipyards, is Pegli; a nice little place. You'll have to go soon. Look the other way."

And Jane, gazing eastwards to where the mountains came almost down to the Mediterranean, and a great, high peninsula thrust out into the water, unconsciously clutched his arm, her hair falling back from her eager face.

"Oh! Is that Nervi? And that couldn't be Camogli?"

"I think it's probably Recco. Camogli will be out of sight. It lies very low, tucked into a corner of the peninsula. Portofino is on the other side of the peninsula, of course, and San Fruttuoso is out of sight, too. It's tucked deeply into the seaward end of the headland. The Promontory of Portofino, it's properly called. You'll have to go to San Fruttuoso. It's a wonderful tramp over the top and down a most beautiful deserted valley, full of olive groves, and ruined farms, and wild flowers."

"Oh, I *am* glad I came!" Loneliness was entirely forgotten.

"You're the right sort," Stephen said, half-laughing. "Even if you are so young."

"I'm eighteen. That's grown-up—I hope," Jane said, a trifle defensively.

"Well, I shall be twenty-four in June. It seems a long time since I was eighteen."

"Didn't you feel grown-up at eighteen?"

"Oh, yes. Older, in some ways, than I do now. But it's different for girls. They need protecting, or so one always supposes." Then he added hastily, "Aren't you hungry? I am." And they walked rapidly back to the restaurant by the station.

They ate at an open window, with a blossoming orchard immediately below and Genoa gradually merging into the sunset haze. Stephen talked lightly about the Blue Dragon and about his main interests, which were swimming, colour photography and learning new languages.

Jane listened, putting in an occasional question or comment, and was glad that he seemed prepared to do most of the talking. He did not mention Martha, but once or twice Jane remembered her with an unreasonable sense of guilt. Would Martha mind if she knew that she was out with Stephen, even if, as she was pretty certain, Stephen had only sought her out because he had a kind heart?

He probably thought her very young indeed and hopelessly inexperienced. But he believed that girls needed "protecting"; that was probably why he had brought her up the Righi on her first evening in a strange city.

All the same, he would probably not have put himself

out unless he liked the look of her. Whatever the reason, Jane was grateful, and, after all, she had no real evidence that he and Martha were more than colleagues. He had treated her casually enough.

They descended the hill in the gathering dusk and caught a trolley-bus back to the Stazione Principe. The great square was already gaily lighted and even noisier than it had been earlier in the day. *Was* it only twelve hours ago that she had first walked out into the blaze of the sun?

Stephen took her to the Ursellos' door and Jane found herself suddenly shy.

"It was—very nice of you. I did enjoy it."

"Good!" he said cheerfully. "See you in the morning at the Blue Dragon!" And then he had turned and was striding away down the slope.

SEVEN

The Lerrantes Again

THE NEXT MORNING JANE'S BREAKFAST TRAY WAS delivered early by Brigità and she ate in her deep pink housecoat, with her gaze on the changing light over the port. Signora Ursello looked in to smile and ask how she was and how she was liking Genoa, and Jane's heart warmed because of the brief kindness. She would really have preferred to breakfast in company, with some chance of getting to know the other people who lived in the house, but trays in the rooms were apparently the usual thing.

She remembered Stephen's friendliness with gratitude and relief, but told herself that she could not count much on his company. By his talk she had gathered that he had many friends in Genoa, for he had lived there for over two years. It occurred to her that he must have known Martha for the same length of time.

She felt more than a little puzzled about their relationship, but was inclined to think that any warmth of feeling was on Martha's side alone.

"But I suppose I can't really know, she thought

humbly. "I don't understand about that sort of thing. Sally always seemed to think me most frightfully stupid about it. *She* always knew if people were attracted. I suppose it's because I've never been in love."

For a moment it seemed almost shameful to be eighteen and not to have had that experience, but, after all, there was plenty of time for it and there was so much else to experience and think about.

She washed vigorously all over, since baths were an expensive luxury, then put on a plain dark red dress that was eminently suitable for work, while being smart and well cut. Adding small white ear-rings and a single string of white beads, she seized her coat and hand-bag and was ready for her first whole day at the Blue Dragon.

Somewhat to her surprise Martha was coming up the first flight of stairs as she reached the top. Martha, too, was wearing a dress instead of a suit and was carrying a short cream coat.

"She wouldn't be bad looking if she wore stronger colours and didn't look so—so pinched," Jane thought, as Martha smiled and remarked that she had wondered how Jane was getting on.

"I shan't make a practice of calling for you—it's too tying—but I thought I would this morning. I hope you slept well and didn't find it too noisy?"

"It *was* noisy," Jane admitted. "But I only heard the row occasionally. I always sleep like a log."

"I suppose you went to bed very early?"

They were out in the brilliant light on the steps by then

and Jane was mortified to find that she was blushing. She felt the hot colour staining her face.

Martha, who missed few things, noticed at once and demanded curiously:

“What on earth are you blushing for? What did you find to do?”

“I—went up the Righi to see the view,” Jane told her, feeling the blush subside. It was the view and Stephen’s kindness that had mattered, but would Martha understand that?

“What—alone?”

There was nothing else for it and Jane said as coolly as she could, wishing heartily that she were more experienced in the ways of subterfuge:

“I was going out for a meal and I happened to meet Mr. Moorhouse. He was very kind and took me up there.”

Martha merely said “Oh?” on a sharp, questioning note, but her features had tightened and she gave Jane a look that was not very friendly.

Jane longed to say, “Honestly, it was the view I cared about, and not being alone on my first night,” but of course she couldn’t. So they walked on almost in silence and Jane was glad when they met Dick Billingly in the Piazza Acquaverde. So far she had only exchanged a few words with him, but he was older and much more sober than Stephen. Though he could not have been more than thirty his hair was slightly grey, but he was handsome in a quiet way.

Later that day she learned that he was married, but

that his wife lived mainly in England, only joining him for a few weeks at a time in Genoa. In September he hoped to return permanently to the London office.

The Blue Dragon office already seemed familiar and Jane's first task was to change the posters in the window. Since she was given free rein over the matter of choice the task occasioned her a little thought, for there was a pile of brilliantly coloured posters in the small storeroom. Eventually she chose one of the Ponte Vecchio in Florence, one of Perugia on its hill, and two of flowering shrubs against blue sea and rocky coast.

"If you take as long every time you won't get much else done!" Martha said, with a faintly caustic note in her voice, and Jane was annoyed to find herself blushing again. She had thought the uncomfortable habit almost outgrown.

"They're so fascinating," she said defensively.

"Of course they are," said Stephen cheerfully. "I always think it must be very satisfying to paint posters." Then he laughed and added: "It isn't so very long since you spent half an hour debating with yourself whether to go all out on Rome, or to give Naples a chance, Martha."

"It was ten minutes," Martha retorted, with a reluctant smile. "I don't often do the window. It was that day Maureen was off colour."

Stephen had greeted Jane cheerfully, and, though she was not even conscious of it, had given her a quick, appreciative look. But he was soon very busy and none of them had much chance of conversation once the office was open and people began to stream in.

Half-way through the morning Martha went off to see the proprietor of the Hotel Rosa about the tour that was expected on Saturday and Mr. Morrison took over at "Inquiries". Jane was left in the inner office to type a long and involved letter to the London manager, and after that there were various other tasks: taking a large number of copies of hotel lists, sorting queries that had come by post, and so on.

Outside the sun was shining brilliantly in a cloudless sky, and though she could see only a yard with a couple of flowering trees in green pots, she had none of the stifled feeling that had grown so familiar during her months at the Silver Shell.

She did wish that she might be in the outer office, dealing with people and their travel queries, but she recognized sensibly that so far she could not be much use. She had proved that she could look up trains, but then so could everyone else and many queries would be altogether beyond her.

"But not for long! Not if I know it!" she said aloud to a large golden cat that had suddenly appeared in the yard. She leaned for a moment on the window-sill and the cat looked up at her with disinterested amber eyes, then raised one silky leg delicately and began to wash it with swift strokes of its tongue.

"I suppose you only speak Italian?" Jane challenged it, and was rewarded by a pause in the washing and a faint, derisive twitch of very long whiskers. "And perhaps French?"

At that moment the door opened and Jane leaped back

guiltily, ashamed of being caught wasting time. But Dick Billingly only smiled at her as absently as the cat, went to a filing cabinet and took out a folder, and retreated again.

When the office closed at twelve-thirty Jane gathered that Martha, Dick Billingly and Stephen were all going to lunch together. She went to get her coat, feeling a trifle left out, but when she reappeared they were all waiting.

"Come with us today," said Stephen. "We usually lunch together at least one day a week. Other times we do what we feel like."

"She managed all right on her own yesterday," said Martha who did not look best pleased.

"Oh, we know she's no Maureen," Stephen said lightly. "But colleagues must stick together sometimes."

Jane followed them, feeling pleased but a little dismayed. She had known instinctively from the first that she and Martha could never be great friends, but she had hoped to manage to get on well enough with the older girl. And already she had made Martha dislike her.

"I wish I'd been alone last night after all," she thought, as they walked in single file along the Via Balbi. The pavements were too crowded, and the trolley-buses swept too close, for walking in a party.

She chose her own meal and ordered it in shy Italian and was rewarded by the approval of the men, though Martha was apparently still absorbed in the menu.

"Maureen spoke French, but she never learned more than twenty words of Italian," said Dick Billingly.

"They must have been insane to *think* of sending her here!"

The absent Maureen intrigued Jane a little. It seemed that she was constantly to be compared with her, mostly for the better. So far she had not heard much good about her, but Dick Billingly was adding:

"But she was very nice to look at."

"If you like that fluffy type," Stephen remarked, as their soup came.

"I don't, particularly. But even when she was being her daftest she managed to look appealing."

But Jane had soon forgotten Maureen in the interest of her surroundings. They had come to a *trattoria* that apparently they all visited often, for the waiter had greeted them with enthusiasm. It was a spotlessly clean small place, with an appetizing smell and a wonderful range of bottles of wine, some in elaborate raffia cases. There were crisp rolls in baskets on very white cloths and sprays of purple lilac in an alcove. The customers all seemed to be business men and girls and the noise was soon considerable.

"I'm in Italy!" Jane told herself, bringing her gaze slowly back to her companions, who were all discussing a film they had recently seen.

She looked at them with sudden awareness and curiosity. Stephen, Dick, Martha. . . . Whatever they were like, she was going to see a good deal of them during her stay in Genoa. So far she liked Stephen, was a trifle intrigued by Dick's distinguished-looking grey streak and firm mouth, and slightly feared Martha, but it was

difficult to know how she would feel about them by September.

She was still young enough to feel that older people were complicated and difficult to understand. They seemed a little remote by virtue of their extra experience.

"But I'll get it! I'll get it!" she thought. "Just being in Italy is the greatest experience of my life."

After the meal they separated and Jane wandered along the Via Balbi. Coming back in deep shadow on the other side she turned automatically into the courtyard of the Palazzo Cordoni. She had almost forgotten the Lerrantes, but evidently they had been somewhere at the back of her mind.

And there, on the far side of the fountain, faintly screened by the silver spray, stood the girl she had met on the train and the lovely child she had seen in the distance in the villa garden.

Jane stopped abruptly and the older girl, after a moment's pause, waved a slim white hand. There was a broad silver bracelet on her wrist which caught the light. She said something to her sister and they came round the fountain, one on either side of it, like figures in a modern ballet.

"So we meet again? This is pleasant! I did hope that perhaps I might see you——"

"I shouldn't have thought you'd even remember me," said Jane, suddenly extremely shy.

"But of course I remembered you. A young English girl coming to work in Genoa, when that's what I would

so much like in London. But it will never happen to me."

"Are you sure? If you want it so very much——" But Jane knew the answer before the Italian girl said regretfully:

"In our family the daughters never work. It's the penalty of having much money."

"Some people would think it a hardship to have to work," said Jane, as attracted to her charming face and elegant but very simple clothes as she had been on the station platform in Paris.

"But you do not - don't, I mean? You look, if I may say so, both happy and efficient."

"I don't mind working," Jane said frankly. "At least, I was in an insurance office in London and I rather hated that, but I've always wanted to work in a travel agency and I think the Blue Dragon is going to be very interesting. Only I don't think I'm very efficient yet."

The younger girl was pulling her sister's arm a little and smiling at Jane. Her small, animated face was alight with curiosity.

"But, Maddalena, please tell! Who is *zis*?"

"We met on the train," Maddalena said briefly. "I told you about it, Desda. She was so kind and found my Cameron brooch. Desda," she added to Jane, "understands English quite well, but speaks it less. Our name is Lerrante and this, you see," once more the silver bracelet flashed in the cool light, "is the home of our family shipping firm. Your name is?"

"Jane Graydon," Jane said slowly.

"That is pretty. So plain and clear. Here in Italy it would be Giovanna."

"I think Giovanna's much prettier," said Jane, with a fast-beating heart. She wondered what they would say if they knew how often she had been called just that by her father, if they knew——

But Maddalena was chattering on, speaking of Genoa.

"There is so much to see. You will not have time yet. Our beautiful, dignified palaces, our cathedral and our churches. The house where Columbus was born."

"And the Staglieno," cried Desda, running her small brown hand through the fountain spray. "That you must see!"

Maddalena laughed.

"Desda is so fond of some of the statues. She likes to draw them. She is so clever with a pencil. Some people say it's a most hideous place, but it is one of the sights of Genoa——"

"I know," Jane agreed. "I want to go there soon. It sounds amazing. All those tombs and statues!"

"There is a Lerrante tomb high on the hillside. Andrea, my brother, calls it an—an abomination. But then he's very modern, Andrea, and likes only art that no one can understand. Or something that is clear and bright—an impression. But Desda—often we go there for her to draw."

A car had drawn up behind Jane some moments before and now, as she saw Maddalena's expression change, she turned round to see the man she presumed to be her grandfather just leaving the palace.

"We must go," Maddalena said, with what seemed

genuine regret. "Perhaps we'll meet again. The Blue Dragon, you say? One day, perhaps, I'll come and find you."

They spoke to the old man and climbed into the back of the car beside him. Jane watched as the big vehicle turned slowly out of the archway and then she made her way back to the Blue Dragon office.

Now, at least, she knew their names, and such pretty ones. Maddalena and Desda! And Andrea . . . that was the dark young man she had seen on the train and who thought the famous Staglieno Cemetery an abomination. Or at least the Lerrante tomb. How attractive the girls both were, especially the gay-looking little Desda. With each brief glimpse, with each small thing that she learned, they fascinated her more.

That night, alone in her high room, Jane wrote to her mother, for she had only sent a postcard the previous day. She described her work and her new colleagues and told about the trip up the Righi. But she mentioned neither the Palazzo Cordoni nor the Lerrantes, and when she had signed her name she sat for several minutes feeling very guilty. How could she help being interested in the Lerrantes? She would not have been human otherwise. But her mother would never understand. She would be angry and disapproving. Worse, she would probably be hurt.

Jane sighed and sealed the letter. What did it matter, anyway? There was no possibility of the chance acquaintance going much further. At the thought, to her utter

astonishment, she felt a peculiar ache at her heart, the sort of ache that she had never felt before in her life.

"I'm lonely," she thought. "That's why." But the ache was still there when she went to bed and she dreamed wildly of fountains that drenched her in spray and a huge blue car that seemed bent on running her down, while Maddalena looked on unconcernedly. More pleasantly, as the night passed, she dreamed that she was playing with Desda and the black poodle in the villa garden.

EIGHT

Desda has an Accident

JANE WAS LONELY DURING THOSE FIRST DAYS IN Genoa. She was a courageous person, and she fought the feeling hard, but at times it threatened to engulf her.

For the first time she knew what it was like to stand on her own feet in a great city, facing the knowledge that no one really cared what happened to her. She was used to the impersonal atmosphere of London, but it was her own place and at night she had always returned to the unfailing security of her parents' house.

It was not so bad during her working hours, though even at the Blue Dragon, where everyone but Martha was friendly, she often remembered that she did not yet belong. She could take no part in the jokes and the references to past events; she was just the junior, more efficient and independent than Maureen, who had to learn the job.

Mr. Morrison was unfailingly kind and helpful, and he seemed to think that she had possibilities, but he was worried because his wife was in bad health and he issued

no definite invitation to his home. Stephen continued to be friendly, and there were times when Jane was aware that he seemed to admire her looks, for he had a way of staring at her that she found disturbing and a trifle exciting. But he very evidently had his own life and friends; at all events he did not suggest another outing during those first days.

It was clear to Jane after a short while that he and Martha certainly went out together sometimes, though his attitude to her seemed very casual. Not so Martha's to him and she seemed to take pleasure in referring to the times when they had gone to the ballet or the opera or on excursions along the Riviera.

At any rate, Jane's work at the Blue Dragon, though at first simple, interested her greatly and certainly promised better in the future. But, though Genoa delighted her at every turn, she found herself dreading going back to her lonely room and the eventual need to go out and seek a meal alone. The more she saw of the city the more she longed for a warm and congenial companion to share her pleasure and discoveries with her.

She liked both the Ursellos and was grateful to be asked into their private rooms occasionally for coffee and a little conversation. She did her best to speak to them in Italian, and they, smiling widely at her brave efforts, were delighted at her knowledge of their language. But they were busy folk and the meetings were brief and usually late in the evening. As for the other people living in the house, Jane soon knew most of them by sight and sometimes exchanged a few words with them,

but they, too, were busy and presumably had their own friends.

In her lunch-time break, and before she returned to her room in the evening, Jane saw more and more of Genoa. She stood at the back of the cathedral during an impressive Requiem Mass; she walked through the long and slightly alarming *gallerie* that carried traffic and pedestrians under parts of the city, and emerged into sunshine again, blinking and deafened. She browsed in bookshops and explored the palaces, many of them put to municipal use, and especially liked the great Palazzo Doria near the dock. It had suffered greatly during the wartime bombing of Genoa, but it had a melancholy charm.

She loved the narrow, shadowy length of the Via Garibaldi, where there were more palaces and a great flowering horse-chestnut tree showing above a high wall hinted at hidden gardens.

Genoa! Its noise and flowers . . . its hurrying people and unending traffic . . . its undoubted squalor in the poorer parts, mitigated to London eyes by the unvarying sunshine. For the sun had shone every day since her arrival and she wore summer clothes and felt cool and free, though the Genoese themselves seemed unconvinced that summer had come in earnest.

She grew gradually bolder over her choice of eating places and bolder, too, over her choice of food. Many restaurants specialized in all kinds of "sea food" and this was her undoing at the end of the week. She treated herself to an expensive meal of lobster and by Saturday

evening was so ill that she grew very frightened and began to be convinced that she was going to die alone in Genoa.

"What a fool I was!" she said to herself, as she lay shivering on her bed after a bout of sickness. "Martha said to be careful what I ate, and so did Mother before I left."

She wondered whether to struggle in search of Martha, but shrank from appealing to her for help even if she were at home. Besides, she really felt too ill to move.

Lying there she tasted the depths of loneliness and for a while, at least, heartily wished herself safely back in London, with her mother to look after her. She saw sad pictures of her funeral in Genoa, with perhaps no one to follow her to the grave, then chided herself for being an imaginative idiot.

But she really did feel frighteningly ill and it was a great relief when Signora Ursello looked in. Immediately her worn, gentle face was creased with worry and she scolded Jane roundly.

"What is it? 'You're sick? Then why didn't you call me? So young a girl and all alone! I told you I'd try to be a mother.'"

And Jane answered in Italian, her voice shaky:

"I—I didn't want to trouble you. And, really, I wasn't able to move far. I think it must be the lobster——"

"Lobster? And you with the stomach not used to foreign food. A strange climate also. I'll telephone for the doctor at once."

"But——"

"The doctor, of course. I don't want you to die on

my hands, do I my poor child? Lie still and soon he'll be here."

The doctor was quiet and elderly and spoke no English. Yes, it must have been the lobster, of course, perhaps coupled with all the excitement and changes of a first few days in Italy. But she needn't worry. She wouldn't die yet. She would live to see much more of Italy and to laugh at her present sufferings. He prescribed a dose that very soon improved matters and left a couple of sleeping tablets so that she would get a good night's rest.

Jane awoke the next morning feeling weak and shaky still, but the pain and sickness had gone. She was able to eat her breakfast in the sunny window and then to dress slowly and wander down by the breezy docks. The Ursellos had insisted that she must eat her midday meal with them and it was a simple meal, probably chosen especially for her benefit.

"You're so kind to me," she said, as they sat over coffee.

"Of course. And one hopes that people in London would do the same for a lonely Italian girl."

Afterwards Jane wrote to her father and mother, but was careful not to mention her bout of illness nor the thoughts that had accompanied it. She had insisted on coming to Genoa, she had assured them that she was old enough to stand on her own feet and had believed it to be true. Therefore it was no use worrying them or being sorry for herself. Besides, she really did feel better and ready to cope with life again.

At three o'clock she decided to visit the Staglieno Cemetery. It would be interesting to see the place and perhaps to look for the abomination—the Lerrante tomb.

She took a trolley-bus to the Piazza Verdi, near the Brignole Station, and then another one that turned inland, following the stony and rather unappealing river. Even on Sunday afternoon the pale, peeling tenements were festooned with washing. Old people lounged in the sun and children played in the dusty gutters.

Jane left the trolley-bus at the cemetery gates and was immediately arrested by the sight of a familiar car. It was drawn up not far away and the chauffeur was reading a newspaper with the air of one who expects, and does not resent, a long wait.

Jane's heart lifted at the sight of the Lerrante car. Perhaps Desda had insisted on doing some more of her drawings, or perhaps the family sometimes paid a ceremonial visit to the "abomination".

She went on with greatly heightened curiosity and pleasure and soon found herself in the astonishing place. She had never in her life seen so much marble, so many tombs, vaults and chapels and life-sized statues. The whole vast place lay under the blazing sun, so that she blinked and groped in her bag for her dark glasses. Ahead was a huge white building reached by a tremendous flight of dead white steps, and all round on the hillside, tier upon tier, were tombs and family vaults, divided by flowering shrubs, little gardens and dark cypresses.

It was like no place she had ever seen; magnificent in

its way, though some might well call it vulgar and ostentatious beyond words.

Almost forgetting the Lerrantes for the time being, Jane was fascinated by the wide variety of Italian names and by many of the statues; here a plump angel, there a life-sized baby with thick stone curls. The air was hot and very sweet with the scent of lilac and wallflowers and early roses.

There were plenty of visitors, mainly foreigners, as far as she could tell. A conducted party of people speaking French hurried past her, and there was a large party of German young people who were chattering and laughing and showing little interest in tombs.

Jane climbed the hillside slowly and perched on a high wall to get her breath and look about her. Almost immediately she spied Maddalena and Desda well below her. Maddalena was leaning against a statue, looking as though her thoughts were far away and Desda was drawing on a small thick pad, her dark head on one side and her slim body unconsciously graceful.

They neither of them saw Jane and when they moved away she longed to attract their attention. But she was too shy to call to them and perhaps they wouldn't want her company. They looked perfectly happy on their own.

She descended rapidly again by some steep steps and, though she rather despised herself for doing so, followed them cautiously at a distance. Desda was laughing and talking and occasionally pausing to caress a stone figure or smell a flower. She looked full of joy and mischief

and so graceful in a crisp blue and white frock that she had the air of a young dancer.

The German party streamed between Jane and the Lerrantes, and the French party, following, stopped to take photographs and listen to their guide. By the time that Jane had managed to make her way through them the two girls had disappeared. But she saw them again a few minutes later, approaching the top of the great white steps. Desda was still half-dancing and apparently not paying much attention to where she was going.

Two or three steps down she seemed to miss her footing and lurched against her sister. Maddalena gave a little cry and shot out her hand. But it was too late. Desda had crumpled up, with one foot under her.

She might so easily have gone to the bottom of the flight that Jane found her heart racing and her hands damp. She made her way to them as Maddalena began to scold the child.

"I saw what happened. Is she much hurt?"

Desda looked up with a face nearly as white as the frill on her dress and Maddalena exclaimed:

"Oh, it's you! So you have come to see our wonderful Staglieno? Her ankle, I think. It was so careless of her, but then she never walks like a reasonable being."

"Can't she straighten it? Oh, that's better!" The heat on the steps was very great and Jane was alarmed to see that Desda looked as though she might faint. But she was making a brave effort to assure them that she was all right.

"Nossing!" she said in English. "Nossing. Soon it will not—pain."

"I'm sure it pains now, though," said Jane, and she and Maddalena bent over the small foot in its childish white sock and sandal. When they eased down the sock the ankle was red and puffy and Desda cried out when they touched it.

"I saw your car," Jane said shyly to Maddalena. "Shall I fetch the man or perhaps we could help her there between us? We could make a chair of our hands—like this."

Maddalena nodded, and, with some effort, they got Desda down the steps and along the more shady paths to the gates.

"It's so kind of you!" Maddalena panted. "So very kind."

The chauffeur saw them as they approached and sprang out of the car to help, and Desda was put into the back, where she insisted in her own tongue that she was perfectly all right now. In a few minutes she would be quite better and would be able to go back and do some more drawings.

"Well, I don't think so," Maddalena said in English. "Not with so swollen a foot, my little Desda. We are going home."

"Then I wish she come also," said Desda, with a sudden engaging smile at Jane.

Jane had just, reluctantly, been going to say good-bye to them, but Maddalena took up the idea with obvious pleasure.

"You see? Desda would like you to come home with us. Would you be willing? I'd like so much to show you our garden, and—if you are alone——" She looked round, as though expecting Jane to have a companion.

"Yes, I'm alone. And—and I'd like to see your garden." That garden into which she had looked so wistfully on her first morning! "But I couldn't—I mustn't——"

"But why not? My mother would be very pleased to give you tea, English fashion. Quite often we have it. My father and brother like it, having been so often in England."

It was so tempting an invitation that Jane felt bitterly torn. She longed to go, but her conscience—and her sturdy common sense—told her that she ought to refuse.

"But they don't know me. They wouldn't like——"

"Only Mother is at home and she would be most interested to meet you. I told her of our meetings and she likes the English so much. She and my father, and Andrea also. Not long ago my grandfather told Andrea that it's a pity he doesn't go and live permanently in England."

So the old man did not share his son's and grandson's views! Jane was not surprised, for almost certainly it was he who had cut off from an only daughter because she had married an Englishman.

She found herself in the back of the big car with the other two and they went speeding back towards the city. Along one side of the Piazza Verdi and then down the wide, flowery boulevard to the sea and the Corso

Aurelio Saffi. She had stopped thinking; things seemed to have been taken out of her hands.

The car swung in through the blue gates of the Villa Lerrante and drew up in front of the white pillars that flanked the front door.

NINE

The Magic of Camogli

SIGNORA LERRANTE WAS IN HER EARLY FORTIES, cool, dark and extremely handsome. In her manner and deportment she reminded Jane of her own mother. She wore a pale green dress that was almost as simple as Maddalena's clothes, but it had probably cost a great deal of money. Everything about her was elegant, but she did not strike Jane as critical or intimidating. The coolness, as she somehow sensed at once, was a veneer that covered a friendly nature.

If she was surprised that her daughters had come home from the Staglieno Cemetery with a total stranger she certainly didn't show it, and, as a matter of fact, to Jane's relief, Desda stole most of the notice during those first minutes. She was given into the charge of a wizened old woman who might once have been her nurse, and Jane found herself sitting in a comfortable chair under a magnolia tree, while Maddalena described what had happened and her mother listened, with her alert eyes looking from her daughter to the English visitor.

"I see. How very fortunate that it was no worse. And

how kind of Miss Graydon to assist you." She spoke English with a foreign intonation but little noticeable turn of phrase.

"May we call you Jane?" Maddalena asked, smiling, and Jane, blushing a little, nodded.

"Oh, please do. I'd like it much better."

"My husband is out, unfortunately, but he would have been most interested to meet you," Signora Lerrante said courteously. "An English girl working alone in Genoa! It must happen more often than one knows, perhaps, but still you are young, my dear, and very brave. Your parents—were they perfectly willing for such an experiment?"

"No, not very," Jane faltered. "My mother was very much against it. But I wanted to come so much."

"The English are, of course, more casual in their attitude to their daughters. I've been in London many times myself and there seems little that young people do not do on their own. We, I think, copy a little, for my husband admires the English—perhaps I should say the British—so much. Not so my father-in-law, but then old people have strong prejudices sometimes," and she shrugged. "Now here is the tea."

A very dark young girl in a crisp uniform brought first a table and then the tea-tray, and Signora Lerrante began to pour out. She had scarcely started when Desda came hobbling across the sunlit lawn, with the poodle jumping round her. She sat down with a bump on the grass and began an animated flood of Italian.

"She speaks only a little English," said Signora

Lerrante, shaking her head at Desda, who grinned back. "A wilful child, this! She should be resting that ankle. Get her that low chair, Maddalena, and a footstool."

"I do speak some Italian, but I'm afraid it's rather bad so far," Jane explained, leaping for the footstool, while Maddalena helped the protesting Desda into the low chair.

"Ah, but it will improve. And you perhaps speak French?"

"Yes."

After that the talk was mainly in French, to Desda's obvious pleasure. Patently she loved to chatter and she seemed to have taken a fancy to Jane. Jane, watching the animated little face and answering some of the eager questions, most heartily returned the compliment. She was interested in Maddalena and liked her very much already, but there was something special about Desda.

At first she could not help feeling shy, but her mother had seen to it that she was never gauche in company and Signora Lerrante had a way of drawing out strangers. Jane found herself talking about her home and about London, while she drank the tea and ate delicious little cakes and biscuits. They discussed music and the theatre and Jane was glad that she was able to talk about some of the plays that were on at the moment. The ballet, too; it appeared that Signora Lerrante loved to visit Covent Garden and she was interested to hear that Jane had seen a new three-act ballet that had caused much criticism and argument.

When the talk turned away from her briefly Jane

snatched the moments to review the incredible situation. She looked round at the beautiful garden, a patchwork of sunlight and shadow and of every conceivable colour, at the big elegant house, and then back to the faces of Signora Lerrante and her daughters.

Where they *really* her relations? There seemed no possible doubt of it, and yet there was an unreality about the whole thing that almost made her doubt her own identity. Yesterday she had been ill and lonely, almost—though without fully admitting it—regretting the urge that had brought her to Genoa. Today she was in fascinating company, having tea with the people who had threatened to fill her imagination since that moment in Paris.

Even guilt was momentarily forgotten. There seemed no room for it as she countered Desda's quick remarks and played with the poodle, Toni, when the tea-table was moved aside.

Later Maddalena led her round the garden to see the lily-pool, round which were some charming modern statues, the formal rose garden and the blue-painted swing that Desda still loved, even though she was supposed to be too old for it.

"Yes, it's very pretty for a city garden," Maddalena said. "But I love the garden of our little villa at Camogli. Quite often we go there for a few nights in summer; it's not very distant. Andrea is so fond of Camogli. He has his boat there. He loves to sail, and I like it also."

It was with reluctance that Jane said she must be going.

"I—I have enjoyed it so much," she said, as they rejoined Signora Lerrante.

"You must come again, my dear. "We'll all enjoy it. And do take care, alone in Genoa. There are hazards in all cities."

"I know," Jane agreed soberly.

"But you're brave and independent. My husband would admire you. Perhaps you may meet him the next time you come."

"You must meet Grandfather, too," Maddalena said, strolling to the gate with Jane, who had firmly refused the offer of the car. "I believe you're brave enough to deal with him! We are all a little in awe of Grandfather. He has lived with us, you know, since Grandmother died. He's fierce, is Grandfather, but—what do they say in England? Something about a bark and a bite?"

"His bark is worse than his bite," said Jane, laughing, though she was by no means eager to meet the stern-looking old man.

"Just so. There was family trouble before I was born that embittered him. An old story now, but Mother says he remembers at times. My father's sister—still, you can't be interested. Oh, look! Here comes Andrea!"

Her brother came striding through the open gates and for some reason Jane's heart gave a little jump. He looked, somehow, so much more forceful than she had realized in that first glimpse of him on the train. He was dark, without being in any way swarthy, with clearly marked features and a healthy, lightly sun-tanned skin.

As Maddalena introduced them Jane was suddenly more thankful than ever that she was wearing one of her prettiest frocks and that she had made a careful toilet before leaving for the Staglieno. She liked the look of quick appreciation in Andrea Lerrante's eyes as he took her hand.

"How do you do? Are you just leaving? What a pity! May I, perhaps, escort you somewhere?"

But Jane was too shy to accept the suggestion, especially as there was a hint of laughter in the dark eyes. She was not at all sure that she could cope with Andrea Lerrante, remembering Maddalena's comments on his views on art and going by her own rapid observation of his intelligent face. She was not stupid nor ill informed, but she was still diffident enough to doubt her powers.

She found herself, two or three minutes later, walking along very rapidly above the sea, without the slightest idea of how she had got across the busy road. Her heart was beating rather quickly and the hand that held her white handbag was very tense.

"Phew!" she gasped, stopping to lean on the wall. "Life *can* be surprising! I never thought—oh, I never thought——" An Italian couple, walking hand in hand, gave her amused looks and she realized that she had spoken aloud.

"But probably I'll never see them again," she thought, as she went on more slowly. "They're naturally courteous, but they can't care anything about me. Why should they?"

She walked all the way back to the Ursellos', stopping

often to watch the cheerful Sunday crowds, and once to listen to a speech over a loud-speaker. It would soon be election time in Italy and the streets and squares were beginning to be hung with banners.

What an afternoon it had been! She looked back at it with a sense of incredulity still. That fantastic cemetery, and then the Lerrante car . . . the lovely garden. Maddalena, Desda, Signora Lerrante, and, last of all, Andrea. For the first time in her life, and much to her astonishment, Jane found herself savouring a handclasp and remembering with a strange nostalgia a face and a voice. It was odd—it was very odd!—But that brief meeting seemed momentous.

Signora Ursello met her in the hall, her kind face a little troubled.

Already she usually spoke to her youngest guest in Italian, having realized that Jane could understand fairly well and was grateful for the practice. But this time she used English.

“Ah, what a pity to be late! A young man he come, wishing that you are to go out with ’im. And I know not where you are and I am so sad——”

“Oh!” For a wild and unreasonable moment Jane wondered if Andrea had found out where she lived and got there before her. “Who was he?”

“Moor——”

“Oh, Moorhouse! Then it was Stephen. I work with him. How nice of him to come looking for me!”

“Such a pit-ee,” said Signora Ursello.

“Well, never mind,” said Jane. “I’ve had a wonderful

afternoon!" And as she ran upstairs she sang *Early One Morning* so cheerfully that the Italian woman raised her eyebrows and shook her head. Perhaps there was another young man, to make her sing like that. And two young men were certainly better than one, at least when one was young and not seriously thinking of marriage. Though, even then, it was better to have a choice.

Relieved, she went into her own rooms. Things were much happier than yesterday, when the young girl had looked so ill and sad. But a pity, all the same, that the nice Englishman had gone away disappointed.

On Monday morning Signor Manazzo, the assistant manager, was back. He was a rather wizened little man, though probably not as old as he looked. He had sad eyes, which turned out to be a deceptive guide to his character, for, in spite of ill-health, he loved life and he also loved a joke. He seemed to take to Jane, and Stephen murmured in passing:

"He's a good sort and devoted to the Blue Dragon. He was in the London office for some years. Watch out for sparks, though. He and Martha don't get on all that well."

"Oh!"

"I suppose they're direct opposites. Martha has almost no sense of humour. Look here! I was sorry you were out. I thought we might have gone along to Pegli or Nervi for dinner."

"I was sorry, too," Jane said sedately. "It was nice of you to bother."

"It was no bother," said Stephen, but at that moment Jane was called away by Mr. Morrison and she gave little thought to the significance in his tone.

The Blue Dragon office was a busy place that morning. The glorious weather seemed to be speeding up the travel urge in people, and there was also the first Blue Dragon tour, which had arrived on the Saturday morning. Dick Billingly was away for an hour or two at the Hotel Rosa to see that all had gone well and to speed the Blue Dragon coach on its way to Rapallo, where the members of the tour would spend one night. The telephone never stopped ringing and Martha, at "Inquiries", could not even find time to drink her mid-morning coffee.

Jane, in the little office at the back, felt herself out of the exciting current of events. Once more her only companion was the ginger cat, who condescended to come to the open window and be tickled under the right ear.

But there were plenty of letters to sort, as well as other tasks, and she could not waste much time playing with an Italian cat. Ginger retreated to a patch of shade in the yard and went to sleep with a front paw appealingly arranged over his nose to keep out the light.

At half-past eleven she was called into the outer office to put out a fresh selection of folders and pamphlets and to help Stephen deal with the railway tickets. She was slow at first, for she had to look up many of the prices, but Stephen seemed satisfied and even gave her a quick word of praise.

"You've got your head screwed on, and it's a very nice

head, too. Did you spend the week-end studying travel matters?"

Jane might have answered: "No, I spent it suffering from too much lobster and having tea with the Lerrantes," and the last remark might have startled Stephen somewhat. But she only pushed back her hair from her hot face and said:

"I love sending people to places."

"When are you going to see some yourself?"

Jane didn't know, though she had a vague idea of going somewhere for a couple of nights the following week-end. If she stayed somewhere fairly near she could get back on the Monday morning.

As it happened the plan was furthered by Mr. Morrison. On Monday afternoon he asked Jane to go to his home for a meal the next evening, and she went rather curiously, having heard various small pieces of gossip about his wife, who sounded either very unwell, or very disgruntled, or both.

She pictured a drab little woman, always moaning, but when Mr. Morrison drove her a little way out of the city and led her into a block of modern flats, the woman who opened the door was tall and quite nice looking, though she certainly looked pale and lacking in vitality and her rather dowdy dress had probably not been bought in Italy.

Over a surprisingly English meal—she had explained that Italian food did not agree with her—she told Jane that she liked Italy well enough in some ways, but that the hot weather exhausted her.

"I only wish we could get back to London, but then there's my husband's job. I often tell him that I'd prefer to live in Liverpool or Manchester—yes, the Blue Dragon has branches in both places. But he loves Italy. Myself, I feel in exile."

"Come, my dear. There are things *you* like," said Mr. Morrison, a trifle tiredly, Jane thought. "Think how much better your fibrositis is here. The moment you get back to England——"

"Well, certainly there are things that I like. I hope I'm not so unintelligent that I can't find good things in any country. But I dread the heat of July and August months before it comes. Not that it's like Rome or Naples of course. I should have been in my grave long since if we lived in either place." Her rather preoccupied eyes looked Jane over.

"You're very young to come abroad alone. I can't think what your parents were thinking of. When I was young I loved my home. But then young people are so restless nowadays, and you look healthy. I suppose nothing upsets *you*."

Remembering the lobster, Jane blushed a little, but Mrs. Morrison was going on:

"I like the look of you, my dear. You have good manners, and that's a lot nowadays. We've made a little plan. My husband says you'd like to see something of the Riviera and really someone ought to look after you. Eighteen! It's fantastic!"

Jane waited politely, toying with her rice pudding, while Mrs. Morrison paused.

"We often try to get out of the city at week-ends. Though, unfortunately, Sundays are the really noisy, crowded time in Italy, with everyone streaming to the sea once they've been to church. We thought you might like to come with us next Saturday. We usually stay in some small hotel and——"

Jane had finished the rice pudding and was wondering what to say. Mr. Morrison was kind and she liked him, and his wife was not really so bad as she had expected, though she seemed preoccupied with her own health and reactions. But did she want to spend a whole week-end in their company?

Mr. Morrison, who might have read her thoughts, said quickly:

"You could go off on your own, Miss Graydon. I'm sure you're more energetic than either of us. You might like to bathe if this warm weather continues."

"It's really awfully kind of you," said Jane and meant it.

"Then that's settled. Now where^a would you like to go? We're well known at hotels at Pegli, Camogli, Portofino. Though my wife doesn't care for Portofino after the very early spring: on the end of the Promontory and so crowded with cars. Santa Margherita——"

"Oh, Camogli, please!" Jane cried, without hesitation. "It sounds so lovely, and——"

"Then Camogli it is," said Mr. Morrison, with satisfaction. "I love to wander by the harbour, especially when the crowds have gone home. A most picturesque and delightful place——"

"With the usual smells," added his wife, but without much rancour.

"Oh, come, my dear! There are no smells by the hotel, and you know you enjoy a room overlooking the sea."

"Well, I do," agreed his wife. "Even in hot weather there's a breeze there. You'd better telephone now, Eric."

It would be Eric! Jane thought. It somehow suited him.

The rooms were booked and Mr. Morrison said he would drive them down on Saturday afternoon. After that Jane helped to wash up and they talked about London until it seemed time to make a move. She said firmly that she would be quite all right returning by trolley-bus and Mr. Morrison went into the street with her.

He waited until Jane was rocking away towards the centre of the city, his face a little anxious. Jane had the feeling that if he had a daughter she would not be allowed to go about in an Italian city alone.

But it was already beginning to seem quite natural to be in Genoa and the first agonies of loneliness had definitely abated. Sitting in the trolley-bus, beside a fat old woman who smelt of garlic and who took up three-quarters of the seat, Jane thought with pleasure of the coming week-end. Just for a moment her mind turned to the Lerrantes and she wondered if by any chance they would be at Camogli, but it was not really because of the faint possibility of that that she had chosen to go

there. It was because she had always loved the sound of Camogli.

The rest of the week passed very quickly. The days were busy and the evenings no longer a nightmare of loneliness. Wednesday, Thursday and Friday Jane was quite content to study an Italian grammar, write letters and sew as she listened to the wireless. Her father had given her a parting present—in travellers' cheques—and she had decided to use most of it to buy a small portable wireless. Listening to the Italian news and other programmes would be one of the best ways of improving her knowledge of the language. And before she could get very far at the Blue Dragon she would have to be very fluent.

Nothing of any great moment happened while she was at work, though she was conscious of various undercurrents. Undoubtedly Martha did not like her, though so far there was nothing very concrete to prove it. Just a look, a sarcastic sentence, a tendency to try to make her look small. Equally undoubtedly Stephen *did* like her, though he did not ask her out again. Jane, in her turn, liked Stephen, but not enough, as she told herself indignantly, to want to take him from Martha. If, in fact, he belonged to Martha at all. She still could not see or sense anything very intimate in their relationship.

She thought much of the Lerrantes, but did not see any of them. She walked past the Palazzo Cordoni with grim resolution, never once wandering into that shadowy

courtyard, and she did not go near the Corso Aurelio Saffi.

Saturday came almost before she expected it, and the afternoon found her in the back of the Morrisons' car, wearing one of her most attractive frocks and with a small case on the seat beside her.

It was so hot that it was good to find the city giving place to the gay villas of Nervi, and good, too, to smell the sea breeze and feel it lifting her hair when it blew through the open windows.

How blue the sea was! And how vivid in the sunlight were the gardens and window-boxes and colour-washed houses.

The main road was crowded with traffic and Mr. Morrison gave all his attention to the driving. His wife seemed nervous and frequently and unnecessarily besought him to be careful, though he was taking almost unnatural care.

If Jane wished fleetingly that she had more lively companions she soon felt in holiday mood again. How could it be otherwise when the sun shone on orchards and olive groves; and wistaria, laburnum and lilac hung over garden walls? The road was high, but presently they swung down on to one that was much quieter. It swooped towards the sea in curves, with big villas nearly all the way, and Jane wondered just where the Lerrantes' house was. Then she chided herself, as she had done so many times before, for not being able to get them out of her mind.

Down, down, down, until they were in a long,

narrow main street lined with shops and old, peeling houses. Camogli seemed to be all in terraces, mostly connected by worn stone steps, and to reach the sea front they had to turn down an extremely narrow, steep little street in the oldest part of the little fishing-port. Jane had a brief glimpse of the harbour, hemmed in by the famous "skyscraper" dwellings, and then they were by the shore.

The hotel was small and quiet and, to Jane's delight, she was given a room with a window that looked straight out across the road to the shore and the dazzling sea. There was a side window that looked into the branches of a beautiful fir tree, but she liked the front one best. When she leaned out through the shutters, which had been partly closed against the heat and brightness of the afternoon, she could glimpse the lovely group that she had seen often in pictures—palely-coloured houses on a little rocky headland, the whole crowned with a church and a solitary tree.

When she looked the other way she could see the great Portofino Promontory dropping sheer to the sea.

She drew in her breath sharply and was for a moment filled with such warm happiness that she could have cried. This was the Riviera, but not the Riviera of smart people and expensive hotels and restaurants. The little shabby town, tucked into a corner of the promontory, was ten times more to her taste.

Mr. Morrison had said: "Do just as you like. I expect you'll want to explore and I know my wife wants a cup

of tea and a rest." So she unpacked her few things hastily, powdered her nose and ran off down the stairs.

It was too early in the year for the bathing huts to be in use, but it would be easy to undress in the hotel later and go straight into the sea. Just now she wanted to see the harbour and she walked there briskly, still enchanted by that characteristic little group of buildings and rocks she had seen from her window.

Close at hand the tall houses were very shabby and poor, with washing trailing from every window, but they had a warm grace to English eyes. Even extreme poverty, in that brilliant light, seemed less horrifying than it would have done in a northern country, and the sun-tanned children rolling in the dust and sprawling on the hot rocks looked happy.

She walked slowly through the archway that divided the seaward group from the harbour and the rest of the little town, and was soon on the quayside. Here was most of the life of the place . . . outspread nets, men painting boats, a few little cafés with trailing vines and bright awnings.

She heard no English voices, but there were a number of visitors wandering about. The natives of Camogli took no notice whatever of them, but worked or lazed in the sun according to their desires.

The brilliant colour made Jane long to be able to paint, or at least to have a chance of taking colour photographs, and she almost wished that she had spent her money on a camera instead of a wireless.

She made her way slowly round the harbour, passing

through a cool and dark little tunnel under the houses, and found herself out on a stone breakwater where the sun was glaringly hot. Across the water the old houses rose in tiers to the villas, orchards and olive groves on the hills above.

Sitting on the very end of the breakwater, with her feet dangling over the clear green water, Jane clasped her hands round her knees and thanked her stars that she had known what she wanted and had not been afraid to take it when it was offered.

For several months yet she would have Italy. Anything might happen. She would do everything that lay in her power to be a success at the Blue Dragon, and she would see more places, as well as coming back to Camogli. Life had never seemed so exciting, so full of infinite promise, as she sat in the blaze of the sun, idle and dreaming.

TEN

The Rescuer

LATER THAT AFTERNOON JANE RETURNED TO THE hotel, changed into her swimsuit and went down to the water's edge with a button-through frock over it. The beach dropped sharply and the water was colder than she expected, but after the first shock she enjoyed herself mightily. She was a strong swimmer, having spent much time in swimming baths and the Serpentine, and she had nothing to fear in the calm blue water. She trod water some distance from the shore, enjoying the slight feeling of adventure that being the only bather gave her. Quite evidently her mother had been right and the Italians did not venture into the water until much later in the year.

But as she began to swim back to the shore she saw two figures running over the sand. A second later they had flung off their light summer dresses and were plunging into the water. Their laughter and voices came to her clearly, though she was still some distance away and there was no mistaking the fact that they were British. As they swam near to her Jane grinned.

"Mad dogs and Englishmen——!"

"Oh!" They were older than Jane, and the one in the red swimsuit and cap had a very pleasant voice. "A compatriot? Yes, I'm afraid the Italians do think us rather mad. Look! There are quite a few people staring as though they've never seen such a sight before."

"I don't care," said Jane, laughing. "It's silly not to bathe in such warm weather."

"Are you on holiday?" They were treading water. "We haven't met many English people. A lot of Germans and some French. *All* the tourists in Italy were in Florence!"

"Oh, have you seen Florence?" Jane was immediately wistful. It reminded her that she had so far seen only a tiny corner of Italy.

"Yes. We've come from Florence today. We're on our way home, really, but we liked the look of Camogli going through on the train, and we vowed we'd have a couple of nights here on the return journey. We've got till Monday. *Are you on holiday?*"

"Not really. I'm working in Genoa. But I'm staying here for the week-end—at the hotel."

"Oh, fancy *working* in Italy! We're at the hotel, too. We'll see you later perhaps."

Jane nodded and swam back to the shore. She rubbed herself down briskly, put on her frock and flew for the hotel steps, a little conscious that eyes were on her, but more amused than anything else by the interest she was causing. She felt elated at having met the English girls, for Martha had avoided her all week and Mrs. Morrison was no substitute for friends of her own age.

Mrs. Morrison met her in the upper corridor.

"My dear girl. I saw you from my window! So brave of you, but I hope you won't catch cold. We're dining at half-past seven."

Jane laughed at the very idea of catching cold, but, remembering the unforeseen effects of the lobster, she gave herself an extra brisk rub down and ate some chocolate. Her room was filled with the light of the lowering sun, and, as she dressed and struggled to make her damp hair look presentable, the sea changed from dark blue to scintillating green and gold.

By the time she went down to the restaurant the western sky was beginning to be aflame with the light of a perfect sunset, for darkness came surprisingly early, she had found, in Italy. The restaurant had windows on three sides and Jane's seat was facing the west and that lovely group on the high rocks.

"Are you sure you don't mind having the light in your eyes?" Mrs. Morrison asked.

Jane dragged herself back from a dreamy contemplation of the scene.

"Oh, no. It's so beautiful. I never saw anything so beautiful before."

"It means another hot day tomorrow," said Mrs. Morrison, with a sigh, and Jane thought fiercely that she would never let herself grow middle-aged like that; disgruntled and ailing, lacking in any joy. She would stay alive and aware; always, always, whatever happened. Anything else was unthinkable.

As the sunset began to die, the church and the houses

and the solitary tree were silhouetted darkly. Just as Jane finished her veal cooked in wine, the delicious little fried potatoes and crisp salad, the bells rang out from the church tower, not an ordinary peal but a lilting tune that somehow put the finishing touch of magic to that most serene and perfect evening.

"They always play a carillon at dusk," remarked Mr. Morrison.

"Oh, please excuse me! I *must* hear better!" Jane said urgently. The restaurant was three-quarters empty, for there was only a party of Swedes as well as the two young women she had met bathing, but there was naturally talk and some clatter. She went quickly to the far window and leaned on the sill, staring out.

The lilting, dancing tune came more clearly now, for the road by the sea was quiet. She caught her breath, realizing that it was a moment she might never recapture, a moment that she would remember, perhaps, when she was as old as Mrs. Morrison. The darkening colour of the sea and sky, the stillness, the satisfaction to the eye of that distant silhouette. . . . She felt most strangely moved, touched to the heart by beauty in a way she had scarcely ever been before. And suddenly she wanted to share the moment; not with the Morrises, not with the pleasant strangers, but with someone she really liked. Someone . . .

"Not Stephen," thought Jane. "There isn't anyone." But suddenly she saw Andrea Lerrante's face and remembered his voice, and was startled to know that she would have liked to be with him.

"But I don't even know him," she told herself, as the tune died away at last and the silence seemed more magic than the cascades of sound. "I don't know him at all, and he looked— well, clever and a bit cynical. Not the kind to be enchanted by bells playing a tune and a sunset sky."

The lights in the restaurant flashed on and she blinked dazedly as she turned to face the room, trying to bring herself fully back to everyday things. The two English girls were eating fruit and talking animatedly, Mrs. Morrison was toying with a banana, and Serena, the pretty and friendly waitress, was waiting to know if Jane would prefer *frutta* or *gelati*. Jane chose the ice-cream and, with apologies, seated herself again.

"It was awfully rude of me, but I did want to hear. There were two tunes. Will they play the same ones tomorrow?"

"I think so," said Mr. Morrison, smiling at her bemused face. When he stopped smiling his face looked, as always, tired and disillusioned. She wondered if he were remembering his own youth, when everything was fresh and exciting and he was not tied to a woman who seemed to have forgotten, or had never known, the meaning of happiness.

The Morrisons had heard about Jane's brief conversation with the two English girls and presently Mrs. Morrison suggested that they should bring their coffee over to their table. The strangers came willingly. Their names were Betty Jenston and Sylvia Sands, and they were both secretaries in big firms in London.

As it happened, they had got their tickets and sleepers through the Blue Dragon, but had bought a holiday ticket on the Italian Railways at the station in Genoa.

"We never thought there'd be a Blue Dragon office there," Betty explained. "But we managed to get what we wanted, though no one spoke a word of English and we only knew a little French and Italian. A *very* little Italian!"

But they had been to Levanto, Lerici, Civitavecchia, Rome, Perugia Assisi and Florence, with just time in Pisa that day to see the wonderful group of the Baptistery, Cathedral and Campanile (the Leaning Tower) and had, as Sylvia explained, managed perfectly well, using a phrase book, a railway time-table and a variety of maps.

"The best way to see any country," said Mr. Morrison and his wife frowned at him

"Well, fancy, Eric! I don't call that being a good businessman! Surely you ought to tell them that they'd do better on a Blue Dragon tour? Far easier and pleasanter, too, with everything done for them and no worry with time-tables."

Mr. Morrison laughed with what seemed genuine amusement.

"Our tours are good, but these ladies obviously haven't much need of them. Still, if you ever want to go to a more difficult country, say perhaps Yugoslavia, we should be delighted to arrange it for you."

"Before I leave Italy I'd like to do just what you've done," Jane said wistfully.

"The only thing is," said Sylvia, tossing back her smooth pale hair, "that we love walking and we've done very little. We thought we might walk over the promontory to San Fruttuoso, and perhaps," she looked at Jane, "you'd like to come with us?"

"A very good idea!" said Mr. Morrison. "You have to climb up to Ruta and then through the woods to Portofino Vetta—a most wonderful view. After that I believe the path gets much narrower and rougher, but the last part of it will be downhill. You could come back by boat. I believe they run every hour."

"I'd love it!" cried Jane, remembering what Stephen had told her about the flowery, deserted valley.

"You must see the Doria tombs at San Fruttuoso. They're very fine. The Dorias, as you'll know, were one of the greatest of the Genoese families. But watch what you buy there. Everything is extremely expensive; postcards, drinks, meals in the restaurant. I hate to warn you, but it's a remote place and the season is short. They tend to look on all tourists as fair game. An attitude that one finds in parts of most countries. But, in my experience, it's rarer than one would believe possible in Italy."

So when Jane went to bed she had the prospect of a pleasant day's walking. She stood at her window for a long time, listening to the quiet wash of the sea and the distant sound of gay music. The moon was nearly at the full and she wondered whether to go and see the harbour at night. But a vast yawn decided her and she undressed, washed and climbed into bed. It had been a

long day; the busy morning at the Blue Dragon seemed very far in the past.

The three girls set off the next morning, wearing comfortable sandals and carrying packed lunches provided by the hotel. It was very hot, even as early as ten o'clock, but they were all full of energy as they set off up the winding road that Jane had come down by car the previous day. The air was sweet with the smell of flowers, the little orchards and olive groves dreamed in the sun, and Jane could not resist looking at the name of each villa in the hope that she might find the house owned by the Lerrantes. But she did not see it.

They sat on a wall by an orchard to refresh themselves with oranges, but were thirsty again when they reached Ruta, high on the hill above Camogli. At Ruta there was an enormous horse-chestnut tree in full flower and cafés with shady awnings that invited thirsty travellers to idle away a warm hour or two.

They willingly idled for some time, enjoying iced drinks and exchanging views and experiences, and Jane made a good story of her first days in Genoa, not missing out her bout of illness and her feeling of bitter loneliness.

"I think you're jolly brave!" said Sylvia, as they rose at last. "It's what I'd like to do, but I don't believe I'll ever get to the point! And you're so young! Only eighteen. Why, I'm twenty-four and I haven't got the courage."

After Ruta the way lay through woods as quiet and freshly green as any in England. The air was filled

with bird song and there were still primroses and bluebells.

"I always thought of Italy as being exotic," Jane confessed. "But this might be England."

"It mightn't really," said Betty, waving her hand. They had been climbing and were now high on the promontory. Now there was a wide view westwards through the shimmering leaves and Camogli lay very far below. The tall coloured houses, the church, and the light that lay over rocks and sea and shore were entirely foreign.

They sat on a sunny bank to eat their picnic meal and then went on again. Higher still they came to a plateau, where there was a hotel, and from there they could begin to see eastwards for miles. Santa Margherita Ligure lay below, and as they walked on, finding the path with only a little difficulty, the Gulf of Rapallo opened out and they could see some of the buildings of Rapallo with the clear-cut mountains behind. It was all spread out below and beyond, one of the finest views in Europe; as brilliantly clear as the posters that Jane arranged in the windows of the Blue Dragon office.

They walked slowly onwards, all three finding great delight in the colour, the fragrance and the heat of the sun. There were flowers all the way.

"Orchids, I think," said Betty, stopping to pick some dull purple blooms. "I wish I knew more."

"I think it's perfect," Jane said dreamily. She had never felt so happy, had never so greatly savoured sunny hours.

There seemed no point in hurrying and they drifted on, finding small, worn signposts where the path divided. They met no one after the famous viewpoint and the path grew very narrow as it began to wind downwards, so that in places they had to brush their way through bushes hot in the sun.

Now there were grey-green olive groves and the hill-sides were terraced for fruit trees and vines. But there seemed no one else in the world. A stream fell softly through grass and flowers and here and there was a ruined house, where more flowers grew between the stones.

Almost imperceptibly the afternoon had passed and it was getting towards evening. Still far below, they heard the sound of a boat's siren, echoing as though from a deep and rocky place. Jane said casually:

"We can't catch it, anyway. Look how the path winds. There'll be another boat. It's early yet." Time simply didn't seem to matter in that lovely, serene place.

At last they saw below them the deep rockbound bay where San Fruttuoso lay, and a few turns of the path brought some old roofs and a stone tower into view. Already the bay and the buildings were in deep shadow, though the heavy sunlight of early evening lay over the higher ground still.

"I wish we could stay up here for ever," Jane thought. "I don't want it to be over."

But the path turned into extremely steep, broken stone steps and they soon reached the first of the ancient stone buildings. Deep silence lay over the whole place,

but some dark-skinned young men were lounging a little distance away.

In the shadows it was suddenly almost cold and there was a dankness about the stones. There was no sign of a little steamer; only a few rowing-boats were drawn up close to a small jetty, and there was one elegant small sailing-boat, brilliant with red and white paint.

In a sort of stone entrance hall with vaulted arches, an old woman, whose face was wrinkled and very wizened, was packing up postcards and lace handkerchiefs. Her small dark eyes stared at them curiously and she immediately spread out her wares again.

But the three girls had grown uneasy and paid little attention to her.

"I suppose there'll be another boat to Camogli?" Betty said doubtfully.

The old woman came to their side urging them to buy her wares, her eyes avid.

"You buy cards, plis. *Novante lire.*"

"They're less than half that in Camogli," Jane muttered, shaking her head. She gathered herself together and asked in Italian:

"When is the next boat to Camogli, please?"

The old woman gave her a toothy and not too pleasant grin.

"There's no boat to Camogli. No boat to Portofino. The last boat has gone."

Jane repeated the information.

"What idiots we were! We should have shouted when we heard that siren. I suppose we should have

made sure of the times, but we never thought we'd be so long getting here." She was beginning to feel thoroughly dismayed, for they were dusty and tired and Betty's sandal had been giving trouble for the past half-hour. There was little chance that they would be able to climb back up that great height before darkness fell, and even with a moon and if they weren't tired . . .

The place was really very cold and Sylvia, shivering, put on her thin white cardigan.

"What on earth shall we do? We *can't* walk all that way back!"

The dark young men had gathered, their faces eager.

"Take you to Camogli. . . . Take you anywhere. Five thousand lire."

"What did they say? Five thousand lire to take us? We just can't afford all that," Betty whispered anxiously. "Our money's getting down. We've only got a little over from the hotel bill and our expenses before we leave."

"I can't afford it, either," Jane agreed. "Though of course that would be between us. I've been spending a lot and I'm not earning so very much. I've got to pay my hotel bill, too. I won't let the Morrisons, even if they offer." She turned rather desperately to the circle of people and spoke in Italian: "We can't afford it. We'll have to walk back."

"Mine is a very nice boat," said the young man who appeared to be the leader. "Five thousand lire is very cheap."

"I might beat him down a bit," said Jane. "He'll think four thousand five hundred better than **nothing**."

"I suppose we'll have to manage it," Betty was beginning, when there was a brisk step on the stones and the group parted. Jane's eyes flew open to their widest extent and her heart seemed to miss a beat. For Andrea Lerrante stood there, his dark eyebrows raised inquiringly.

As Jane's gaze met his he said in his assured and almost accentless English:

"What's the matter? Can I be of any assistance?"

"Oh, I *am* so pleased to see you!" cried Jane and took a few eager steps towards him.

ELEVEN

In the Moonlight

EVEN AS SHE WENT FORWARD SHE REALIZED WHAT she had said and began to blush deeply. How *could* she have been so spontaneously glad, and to tell him so? But, though she would never have admitted it, she had begun to feel alien and strange in the evening shadows of that remote place and a familiar face—Andrea Lerrante's face—was more than welcome.

She stopped again abruptly, saying uncertainly:

"You see, we've missed the last boat. We haven't very much money and——"

Andrea glanced shrewdly from face to face and the old woman, muttering something, shuffled away to deal with her cards and handkerchiefs. The leading boatman began to speak eagerly:

"It's all right, Signor Lerrante. I was merely offering to take these young English ladies back to Camogli——"

Andrea's eyes had passed to the sun-tanned, weary-looking girls and rested longest on Jane in her green frock, with her soft dark hair swinging back from her face.

"Don't trouble. I will take them back to Camogli." Then he added in English, as the men went off: "Maddalena and Desda and I were in the restaurant drinking coffee. It was Desda who saw you and we knew that the last boat had gone. So early in the year they do not run late. Perhaps you would like coffee, too, before we leave?"

Jane, still rather overcome, made the introductions awkwardly.

"It's very nice of you," Sylvia said, quite poised and happy now that they had been rescued by so good-looking a young man. "And I'm sure we'd all like coffee. We've been walking all day and——"

Andrea looked at Jane and she said:

"Oh, yes, thank you. But——"

"Then that's all right and my sisters will be delighted: Desda has talked of you often, and Maddalena had intended to see you again. But they have spent since Wednesday in Camogli. I joined them yesterday."

The restaurant was empty but for the table where Maddalena and Desda sat, but the waiter immediately brought fresh coffee. They all sat down and once more there were introductions. Desda bounced up and down in her seat, her bright eyes going from one face to another.

"Poor Desda!" said Maddalena, laughing. "But it will teach her to work at her English. We are so pleased to see you again, Jane, and Desda's foot is now quite better. You stay in Camogli?"

"Yes. Till early tomorrow morning. I'm with Mr.

Morrison, the manager of the Blue Dragon, and his wife."

"Ah! I'm glad you see Camogli! We love it always, though Desda is sad that she still has to do her lessons. We bring her governess with us. But today being Sunday, Andrea brought us out in his boat."

She turned to Betty and Sylvia, asking about their holiday, and Jane, drinking her coffee, savoured the astonishing moment. San Fruttuoso had seemed curiously menacing for a short while, but now it was merely an interesting place tucked into the high rocks of the promontory. The presence of the Lerrantes had altered everything. But how strange to meet them again . . . how strange it had been to see Andrea standing there, handsome in his casual clothes. She remembered how he had looked at her, and, glancing up, found that his eyes were again on her face.

She moved a little and he said:

"Before we leave you should see the Doria tombs."

"But of course," said Maddalena. "You haven't seen them? They're very fine. So great a family, to whom Genoa owed so much of her greatness and prosperity."

"I'll take them," said Andrea, and, after a few words with the old woman, who was still hovering under the cold stone arches, he conducted them down a flight of steps into a dark, chill place. When the light was switched on the great tombs were revealed, magnificent in their black and white marble.

"I am called after Andrea Doria," he said, as they moved from one to another. "But we Lerrantes have

none of their blood. A much later and less great family I'm afraid! And now we had better go, or you'll be very late for dinner."

One of the men came to help the girls into the red and white boat, and his deference was so obvious that Sylvia's fair eyebrows shot up.

"Who on earth *are* the Lerrantes? Luck your knowing them! How did you meet them?"

"They own a great Italian shipping firm," Jane murmured back, as they settled themselves on a cushioned seat. "I met them quite by chance."

"Aren't they all nice-looking? The little one is lovely, and as for the brother——"

The boat had an engine as well as sails and they were soon slipping away from the jetty and making for the open sea. Looking back, Jane saw the few buildings of San Fruttuoso crouching under the cliffs in the deep shadows and above, far above, were the olive groves and the flowers and the ruined farms. She vowed to herself, as she trailed her fingers in the water, that she would go back, but not perhaps to San Fruttuoso in the evening.

Out of the deep inlet the sun was still warm, though it was already beginning to sink. The water was green and gold, with a glimmering shade of pink, and the promontory rose above them, now bathed in the brilliant light.

After a little argument Desda was allowed to take the controls and the engine purred softly as they headed towards Camogli. Maddalena was again talking to Betty

and Sylvia and Jane found Andrea by her side for a moment.

"You like being on the sea?" he asked, smiling at her.

"I love it! I once learned to sail on the Norfolk Broads——"

"I'm using the engine now to get you back quickly, but later perhaps—— You go back to Genoa tomorrow?"

"Yes."

"A pity. But then I also am going back. I work, you know, in the Lerrante offices. So does my father. My grandfather has still an interest, but his health is very bad." Then after a moment he added in a very low voice: "I'd like to know you better, Jane from England. Would it be very unconventional of me to suggest that we might meet tonight at— say half-past nine? We might look at the harbour by moonlight."

His eyes were half-amused, but his voice was quite serious. Jane glanced at him doubtfully and then laughed.

"I don't mind being unconventional, but I don't think it is— very." Though, as she spoke, she wondered what the Lerrante attitude would be to such a meeting. "I wanted to see the harbour last night, but——"

"Well, tonight you'll see it with me. I'll meet you by your hotel."

And then he had moved away to take the boat into the crowded harbour, and Jane sat with her face over the gunwale, pretending to look at some floating weed, but in reality a mass of conflicting emotions.

She wanted to go. . . . *She* wanted to know Andrea Lerrante better. But suddenly guilt and doubt were back.

To get to know the Lerrantes more intimately would be dishonest, not only to her mother but to them. Andrea was almost certainly her first cousin. . . .

"But first cousins do marry," said a voice in her mind. "It doesn't matter a bit so long as they're healthy; everyone says so."

Then she sat up, appalled. For she had never before thought of marrying anyone, and there was certainly not the slightest chance in the world that she would ever marry Andrea Lerrante.

Jane was a trifle late for dinner and the Morrisons were most interested to hear of her experiences at San Fruttuoso. When the Lerrantes were mentioned even Mrs. Morrison forgot to grumble at the way the fish was cooked.

"My dear Jane! Do you know them? Such an important Genoese family, and all so attractive by all accounts. Except for the old man, who is a bit of a character—and not a very nice one, so gossip says. I saw the two girls once walking in the Via Garibaldi, and I must say I thought them lovely."

"The son is said to be good-looking as well," remarked Mr. Morrison, with a surprisingly keen look at Jane, and she was annoyed to feel herself blushing. *When* was she going to grow out of the silly habit?

She explained briefly about her meetings with them, but all the time half her mind was given to the loveliness of the fading sunset and to the enchantment of the dancing bells of Camogli.

Oh, lovely place! Oh, lovely life that held such colour and beauty . . . deserted olive groves . . . orchids in soft green hollows . . . a red and white boat on sparkling water . . . Andrea Lerrante.

After the meal Jane sat on the balcony at the side of the hotel talking to Betty and Sylvia, who were planning to go to bed early in preparation for their last day in Genoa and the journey home to London.

"We'll often think of you," Sylvia said, "when we're straphanging at half-past five in the Tube. It certainly pays to have *color*, *ge*. To think you'll have all this until September!"

"I shall be working most of the time, though," said Jane, her eyes on the great full moon. "And you *have* seen more of Italy than I have."

"Oh, well, you'll get around. Why not ask them to send you to the Blue Dragon place in Rome for a bit? It's almost in the station. Such a marvellous station, too. Betty was more impressed with it than with St. Peter's, though she denied it fiercely!"

"Yes, I know," said Jane, who had addressed quite a number of letters to the Rome office. "I might ask to go next year, if I'm still with the Blue Dragon. But it all depends——"

"Oh, you're efficient, anyone can see. And so very attractive. I'm sure looks count a little in a travel agency. Looks and a pleasant, friendly manner."

Jane was startled and was glad that it was fairly dark on the balcony. The casual compliment, coming from a much older and more sophisticated girl, carried weight.

"I'm afraid that travel knowledge counts more, but I'm learning all the time and my Italian has come on tremendously even in less than a fortnight."

"Well, never fear. You'll make it. Oh, well, nine o'clock! Shall we see you in the morning? If not we'll say good-bye now. Ships that pass in the night, but it's been very pleasant."

"I'll never forget San Fruttuoso and that old woman," Jane said laughing. "Thank you for a lovely day. Oh, we're having breakfast very early because we have to get back to Genoa."

"Bed for you, too?" .

Jane hesitated.

"No. I'm going out."

"Oh—a date? Lucky girl on such a perfect night! It wouldn't be that charming young Italian, would it?"

"It would, but don't tell anyone," Jane said and fled to her own room. In the brilliance of all three electric light bulbs she stared into the mirror at her flushed face, gleaming hair and bright eyes.

"I don't look bad. This frock does suit me and so does sun-tan. I never looked as nice as this in London."

She was restless until half-past nine, but when the time came to go and meet Andrea she would almost have been glad not to have to go after all. Perhaps he would not be there, anyway. Perhaps he had thought better of it during dinner with his family.

But Andrea was there, leaning over the rail above the shore. They fell into step and Jane, very shy, felt tongue-tied and quite sure that anything she could manage to say

would bore him. However, Andrea, after an appreciative glance at her in the lights of the nearest café, seemed perfectly happy. As they walked slowly along above the quiet sea he talked about the year he had spent in London, about the things he liked best in England, and invited her views on politics, art, and a variety of other things.

After a period of acute panic, when she was sure that her views would sound hopelessly immature, Jane found herself talking eagerly. Not for nothing had she been one of the leading lights of the Debating Society in her very large High School. She had a mind of her own, had read fairly widely, and thanks to her mother, who had taken her only child to galleries and art exhibitions from an early age, was not wholly ignorant of modern art. She had a fleeting memory of her mother's cool, quiet presence and for a moment the warm beauty of the night was spoilt. It was not so that her only daughter could talk to Andrea Lerrante, her unknown nephew, that Giovanna Graydon had tried to induce an interest in art. It was simply because, coming from the Lerrante family, from a childhood and youth where music and art had loomed so important—that she thought both part of life. She had shaken off much of her early experience when she left Italy, but not that.

There were plenty of people round the harbour and the little vine-hung cafés were doing a brisk trade. But they walked on, past the old houses and the moored and anchored boats, until they were where Jane had been on Saturday afternoon; at the very end of the breakwater. Few people had wandered so far and it seemed very quiet.

The huge moon cast a soft light on the old skyscraper houses, their colours merged; the great promontory rose darkly against the stars, and the hillsides behind Camogli were scattered with lights from the many villas.

Jane fell silent and Andrea looked down at her shadowed face.

"It's a perfect night. Not an evening for being alone. How long have you been in Italy?"

"Not quite two weeks. It still doesn't seem—real."

"Oh, it's very real. Full of faults, injustices, poverty. When you're rich you can't help feeling some guilt for all the terrible poverty that there is. My grandfather says I was born with an over-developed social conscience. He says things like that very often."

"But hasn't he——?"

"Not he. He likes the good things that money buys, though one could hardly say that he gets happiness from them. He's a hard man; I believe always has been. Frequently we disagree. But my father is like me or I, I suppose, am like him. Have you any Italian blood?"

Jane stared at him with her mouth a little open. The unexpected question quite took her breath away.

"Why—why do you ask?"

"I hardly know. But you've a look. Not in the eyes, but perhaps in the bones of your face, and you speak Italian with a far better accent than most English people achieve. Giovanna would be a better name for you than Jane, though I like Jane. A charming short name."

Jane strove valiantly to sound casual, but her voice seemed unlike her own.

"Yes, I believe there is a little. But I've never been to Italy before and I'm only learning to speak Italian."

"Then I'll help you. We'll speak it together sometimes," he said quietly, having not, apparently, noticed her confusion.

They sat on the stones, still warm from the day's heat, and Jane relaxed into happiness again. Tomorrow she would be back in Genoa and this whole week-end would seem like a dream. Perhaps she might never see Andrea Lerrante again; perhaps—— But he was saying:

"Maddalena is so pleased to know an English girl. She really longs to go and live in London for a time, but I think there's very small chance of that. In our family we're conservative about what our womenfolk do. Grandfather's influence, you see! He had a daughter who married an Englishman against his wishes. It nearly finished the old man, so I'm told. He never could bear anyone to go against him, and—great sin!—the man was poor. But you can't be interested in family history. Shall we go and have something to drink? Coffee, perhaps."

They wandered back to the cheerful life round the harbour and Andrea led Jane to a table in a corner under a trail of vines. Immediately below the little balcony the boats moved at anchor. Over the coffee he talked again about impersonal things and Jane felt, with increasing respect, that his was a clear and intelligent mind.

She looked at his face in the rather dim light, taking pleasure from its firm lines. The touch of cynical amusement that had struck her earlier seemed now unimportant. Suddenly his glance met hers and for a moment they

stared at each other. Only for a moment, but Jane thought wildly:

"It's important! I don't understand a bit. I never knew I could feel like this."

They walked back to the hotel almost in silence, but it was not uncomfortable. He said when they reached the steps:

"We'll meet again. I can find you at the Blue Dragon office or where you're living. Is there a telephone at the Ursellos'?"

"Yes. In the entrance hall."

"Ah, well, it will serve. •Good night, Jane."

"Good night," Jane went quickly up the steps. But at the top she could not resist looking round. He had gone, and the little promenade was quiet and almost deserted.

It was a long time before she fell asleep, for the events of that strangely momentous day kept on passing through her mind. The last thing she remembered was Andrea's face, with the shadows of the vine leaves moving over it.

"Something happened," she thought. "To me, anyhow. And it's something that's got to un-happen again. Because otherwise the future will be quite impossible."

TWELVE

Jane Goes to the Ballet

AFTER AN EARLY BREAKFAST THE MORRISONS AND Jane set off for Genoa. It was another warm morning, but rather grey, and the changed light made the week-end seem more than ever a dream. How long ago the previous day seemed, thought Jane, as they climbed by the many steep bends to the main road and then sped swiftly westwards. She snatched her mind hastily from all memories of moonlight and Andrea Lerrante's face and voice and instead, concentrated on the delights of the walk to San Fruttuoso. Soon, very soon, she would have other week-ends on the Riviera. There were supposed to be lovely walks up into the foothills of the Maritime Alps and perhaps she would find other pleasant companions. Poor Betty and Sylvia having a last few hours in Italy and then catching the express in the evening!

All the same, life was going to be very busy for her, too, and Jane told herself sternly that all that mattered now was the Blue Dragon. It was her job that counted, for so much of the future depended on her doing well.

Mr. Morrison dropped Jane at the Blue Dragon office and then took his wife home. Jane was early, but Signor Manazzo and Stephen were already there. Both gave her sun-tanned face an appreciative look and Stephen said:

"Anyone can see you had a good week-end! You look—splendid." He seemed to change the word at the last moment, and, as Jane carried her case into the inner office, she was vaguely aware that Stephen found her attractive. It was an odd thing, but she had been almost unconscious of her looks in London, but in Italy not only Stephen gave her appreciative glances. It happened quite often in buses and when she was walking along the street.

"I think I'm waking up or something," she told herself, as she powdered her nose, but that brought her perilously near her awareness of the previous night and she went out quickly to see what there was to be done. Fresh maps and folders to put out, anyway, and fresh flowers to be arranged in the wall brackets and in the window. As she fetched fresh water Stephen said:

"We'll be short-handed today. Martha's sent a message that she's ill."

"Oh!" Jane was conscious of a faint feeling of relief and felt mean. "Is she bad?"

"I don't know. A chill, the message said. Martha's usually as strong as a horse, though she doesn't look it."

The day was soon well into its stride. Mr. Morrison arrived, the office opened to the public, and Jane set to work to sort the post. Dick Billingly went off to speed the second tour on its way to Rapallo and after a time Jane was called into the main office.

"Just help where you can, Miss Graydon," said Mr. Morrison, as she passed his own small office. He usually worked with his door open in the warm weather. "I've got to get on the telephone to London and Rome, but I'll be out there as soon as possible. A nuisance that Martha's ill when we're beginning to be so busy."

It *was* a nuisance, of course, and Jane rather disliked herself because she found it so much pleasanter without Martha's slightly sharp and disapproving presence. Her pale eyes had always seemed to watch for Jane to make a mistake and somehow her very efficiency, her obvious confidence in her own ability, had a bad effect on Jane.

Signor Manazzo was dealing with reservations and Stephen was dividing his time between railway tickets and inquiries. Queues were steadily forming at each section of the counter and there was some impatient muttering, especially from a large man at the back, with a strong Lancashire accent and an over-sunburnt face and bald head.

"Disgusting, I call it! Eh, in Manchester we *know* how to be businesslike. I'll book with Cook's next time and that's flat."

"I'm sorry, Sir," said Stephen, over half a dozen heads. "We're short-staffed this morning." Then to Jane, in an undertone. "Do what you can, there's a dear. You can look up trains, anyway, and dole out the correct folders."

Jane obediently took her place under the "Inquiries" notice and dealt in rapid succession with a woman who wanted to know about Blue Dragon day tours from Genoa, a man who wanted to know about hotels in Sestri

Levante and Lerici and insisted that they must be cheap, a youth with a huge rucksack requesting a street map of Genoa, and two German women who wanted to hire a Blue Dragon coach for a day to take a party of children to Rapallo. They spoke only a very little French and no English or Italian, but Jane dealt with them as best she could and was relieved when Mr. Morrison appeared to make the final arrangements about the hire of the coach.

"A very nice manner and as cool as a cucumber!" Stephen murmured in Jane's ear. "And now for heaven's sake deal with Lancashire. I've still got these three."

Jane flashed him a grin and turned to face the gentleman from the North of England.

"Well, at last!" he cried, mopping his red face with his handkerchief. "Sun may not be shining, but it's right hot! Now see here, you look very young, but maybe you've got your head screwed on. I must say you seem to have. Last year me and my wife and daughter came on a tour, but this year the wife put her foot down and said we'd manage on our own. She didn't like all them early starts and not being able to stay on if we took a fancy to a place. We want to go to some of the smaller resorts. Any suggestions?"

Jane was more than a little intimidated by his fierce blue eyes and his air of standing no nonsense, but she looked up at him with a smile.

"Yes, I think so. I can give you folders and hotel lists and if you're moving on it might be a good idea to get a holiday ticket on the railways. They're much cheaper."

"Eh, we're in our own car, lass. So there's no nonsense

about railway tickets. Now let's see where you can suggest."

He took up a quarter of an hour of her time, but, in the end, departed looking satisfied.

"If all this turns out well I'll swear by the Blue Dragon!"

"Yes, do," said Jane, smiling sweetly at him. "I hope you have a very pleasant holiday."

After that there was a lull and she found herself, as she sorted more folders, drifting back into her own thoughts. Where was Andrea Lerrante at that moment? Very probably only a hundred yards or so down the Via Balbi, in the Palazzo Cordani. He had told her that he was returning early.

She was suddenly so absent-minded that she told someone who wanted to go to Civitavecchia to catch the Sardinian boat that he would have to go to Rome first, and Signor Manazzo, overhearing, said hastily:

"Miss Graydon, not to Rome. Practically all trains stop at Civitavecchia on the way to Rome."

Jane blushed vividly.

"Oh, I'm sorry! Of course. Then the best train will be——" And she looked it up correctly. Patently she must keep her mind on the job; it was humiliating to have been caught out on such a silly mistake. She knew perfectly well that most of the trains, even the fast ones, stopped at Civitavecchia.

When Dick Billings came back it was easier, and she presently went into the inner office to type some letters.

Over her solitary lunch she read an Italian book assiduously, looking up the unfamiliar words in a tiny

pocket dictionary, and her thoughts only strayed occasionally to Camogli and the happenings of the week-end. When she was leaving the *trattoria* she found Stephen at her elbow.

"Jane! I've just managed to get seats for the ballet, for tomorrow night. It's the Royal Ballet from London and they're dancing *Les Sylphides* and *Giselle*. Do say you'll come. They're very good seats."

Jane looked at him doubtfully.

"It's very nice of you, but——"

"Why 'but'? You haven't been to a theatre here, have you? And I heard you saying recently that you liked ballet. Of course, if you're booked——"

"No, I'm not booked, but——" They were walking round the Piazza Acquaverde, managing to avoid the inevitable workmen, who had a large section of the road and pavement up.

Stephen stopped dead, then drew her into the front of the station.

"Look here! I'd like you to come. It may not have occurred to you, but I like you very much."

"And I like you, Stephen," Jane said awkwardly, wondering how on earth she could say to him that she didn't want to hurt or annoy Martha. It was so difficult not knowing what there was, or had been, between them. Perhaps it *was* all on Martha's side; she was inclined to believe that that was the truth.

"What is it, then?"

But it was clearly impossible to explain and Jane said unhappily:

"Nothing."

"Then you'll come? Good!"

He talked about other matters as they returned to the Blue Dragon, and they were too busy during the afternoon to have any further chance of conversation. Jane helped behind the counter for a while, then took down and typed some letters and unpacked several parcels of travel literature.

She was just leaving at the end of the day when Mr. Morrison called to her.

"Oh, Miss Graydon, you lodge near Martha's place, don't you? I wonder if you'd call in and find out how bad she is and tell her I'm sorry to hear she's ill?" He handed her a thousand-lire note. "Get her a few flowers, will you? It's depressing being ill in digs, even though I believe ~~she's~~ very happy where she is."

Jane could hardly refuse the commission, but she would have been very glad to do so. She had always found Martha intimidating, from that first moment of meeting at Victoria Station, and after the increasing strain between them—but there was nothing else for it!

She bought some roses and made her way to the tall house where Martha had her room. It was a very pleasant room, big and light and with some unexpected touches. Patently Martha had been in it for some time and had imposed a little of her personality on it. There were two or three pale water-colours of the Thames on the walls—Martha, Jane thought, *would* chose dim little paintings—a proper dressing-table with lacy mats, and a frilly blue curtain across one corner.

Martha herself, looking more pinched than ever but with a far brighter colour, was in bed, wearing a pale blue bed-jacket.

She stared at Jane and Jane looked doubtfully back, before depositing the roses on the blue bed cover.

"Mr. Morrison—he asked me to call. To—to bring you these flowers and to say he hoped you'd soon be better."

"Very nice of him," said Martha, her eyes on Jane's face. "I must say *you* look very well." Her tone wasn't friendly, but she looked so ill that Jane's heart softened.

"Are you very bad? What is it?"

"The doctor says a sharp chill. Heaven know how I got it in this heat! I hate being ill; I never am as a rule. And when they're beginning to be busy at the Blue Dragon, too! I've got a temperature and I've been sick, and my *head*—— But Signora Canetti has been very kind. She looks in every hour or so and brings me cold drinks and things."

"If I can do anything——" Jane felt too large, too healthy, too schoolgirlish altogether.

"No, there's nothing. You go off and enjoy yourself." Her tone implied that that was all Jane cared about. "I'll be back as soon as I can, but the doctor says I've to stay in bed till Wednesday or Thursday."

While she was talking Jane had spied an enlarged photograph on the table by the bed. It was of the Blue Dragon staff, including Martha herself. Stephen, in an open-necked shirt, was standing beside her.

Martha's eyes followed her gaze.

"That was taken on our outing last September. We generally have a day together somewhere along the coast. That was taken at Portofino. Stephen and I hired a boat and had a wonderful time."

"Oh!" Jane said feebly, and soon after that took her departure.

Back in her own room she stood at the window, looking towards the docks. Poor Martha, if she were really in love with Stephen! For the first time Jane was beginning to understand what that might mean in terms of happiness and heartache. For the first time . . ."

"I'm being very silly," she told herself, as she began to change into another frock. "I came to see Genoa—to see Italy. I never thought of anything else. And I won't think of it now."

Tuesday at the Blue Dragon was busier than Monday and Jane scarcely gave a thought to the fact that she was going to the ballet with Stephen. But at the end of the afternoon he asked:

"What time shall I call for you? You'll want time to cool off and change. Phew! It is hot! So grey and thundery! I thought we might have dinner at a hotel I know."

They made the necessary arrangements and Jane hurried home to change. She put on a turquoise blue dress with a very full skirt, and the bright colour brought out her clear sun-tan. She caught up a soft white stole, in case it was cooler coming home, and a small bag, and was looking out of the window when she saw Stephen striding towards the steps.

It was fun to be going out; far better fun than spending a solitary evening studying Italian. She ran downstairs in high spirits and thought how healthy and cheerful Stephen looked. A nice, uncomplicated young man, but—she thought it for the first time—a trifle dull.

Stephen, however, was a pleasant companion. They had a good dinner in a quiet hotel and then walked the short distance to the Piazza de Ferrari. Cars and taxis and people on foot were approaching from all directions and Jane was suddenly thrilled. The last time she had been to the ballet was at Covent Garden on a cold, wet night in March. Now she was in Italy and it was May. In Italy!

Their seats were so good that she hoped anxiously that Stephen had not spent more than he could afford.

"Sometimes I can't believe I'm me," she murmured to Stephen, as the members of the orchestra took their places.

Stephen rightly interpreted the remark.

"Living in Italy, you mean? I felt like that at first. But one gets so used to it that one doesn't notice it any more. A pity, in a way. I enjoyed the thrill and even, looking back, the first loneliness and the difficulties."

Jane could not quite say that yet, but at least her terrible feeling of solitariness had not lasted very long. She sank into silence as the lights dimmed and the familiar Chopin music filled the theatre. She had seen *Les Sylphides* a number of times, but always there was magic in the soft rising of the curtain, revealing the grouped white-clad figures on the blue-lit stage.

Many of the dancers were as familiar as the ballet itself

and she wondered fleetingly how they liked being in Genoa. Of course they must be used to travelling to foreign countries.

In the first interval she and Stephen remained in their seats.

"I always like the second act of *Giselle* best," Jane remarked. "Though the first is very colourful and dramatic."

"Always? Have you seen it so often, then?"

"Well, I have, and I love it more each time. My mother started to take me to the ballet when I was quite little. I even had lessons."

"That's why you move so beautifully," he said.

"I didn't know I moved beautifully," she said ingenuously. "I wasn't one of the many children who dream of being ballerinas."

"No, you dreamed of travelling."

"Ballerinas travel, too."

Then the music started again and the curtain rose on the first act of *Giselle*; the two little cottages and the backcloth of a castle on the mountains. Perhaps it was the still exciting fact of being in Genoa, but Jane had never enjoyed the ballet so much before. When, finally, *Giselle* was dead she came back to ordinary conversation with an effort.

In the second interval they wandered into the foyer and suddenly Jane's heart leaped. For she had had a glimpse through the chattering, drifting crowd of Madalena Lerrante in a long white frock, with a flower in her dark hair, and beside her was her brother, even more

handsome in evening dress than he had been in the casual clothes he had worn at Camogli.

Stephen noticed her start and asked in surprise:

"What's the matter? You look quite strange!"

"Nothing. It must be the heat. I—I saw some people I know."

"I didn't know you knew many people in Genoa."

"Oh, I only know them slightly." For the life of her Jane could not keep her eyes away from Maddalena and Andrea, who were now in a group with several other young men and girls. It hurt her in a sharp, astonishing way that they seemed so remote, so elegant.

Stephen followed her gaze.

"Some of the élite of Genoa. I believe that's the Ler-rante girl and her brother. Do you mean," he added, "that you know *them*?"

"I've met them a few times," Jane said briefly. "I had tea at their house, but it was more or less by accident. The little one—Desda—sprained her ankle at the Staglieno Cemetery and I helped her. Then they were at— at San Fruttuoso."

She was relieved when Stephen went off to get coffee, and she leaned against a pillar, with the crowd milling about her, catching brief glimpses of Maddalena's animated face and the back of Andrea's head. They never looked in her direction and she was glad.

When they went back to their seats she saw the Ler-rantes a few rows away with other members of their party and wondered that she had not noticed them before. Though she tried very hard she never quite lost herself in

the usually beloved second act of *Giselle*. The white-clad Wilis all seemed to have a look of Maddalena and Albrecht bore a decided resemblance to Andrea Lerrante.

When the ballet was over they found that rain was swishing down and lightning flickered over the Piazza de Ferrari. The square was a mass of private cars and taxis and Stephen looked anxious.

"You stay here. I'll try and get a taxi. You mustn't spoil that pretty frock."

But there were no taxis to be had and in the end, with his coat over her shoulders, they flew for a trolley-bus some distance away. Jane laughed and made the best of it, for he had meant to give her a happy evening, but she visualized, for one clear moment, the Lerrantes going home in their big car.

The trolley-bus was jammed with people, all talking at once, and all very wet, and the rain fell faster than ever, while the Via Balbi looked unreal in the lightning flashes.

"I'm sorry about this," panted Stephen, as they raced for the Ursellos'. On the steps he took her wet hand and held it for a moment. "Good night, Jane. I hope that frock isn't spoilt."

"It'll be all right. Thank you, Stephen. I did enjoy it," Jane said and ran indoors and upstairs to fling off her wet shoes and gently ease the frock over her head. In her housecoat she stood at her window watching the storm, excited and disturbed and feeling that sleep must be hours away.

THIRTEEN

Dinner with the Lerrantes

MARTHA WAS AWAY FOR THE WHOLE OF ONE week and Monday and Tuesday of the next. She came back to the Blue Dragon looking more or less her normal self, but she was having bad headaches, which were not helped by the thundery weather. She dealt with her work as efficiently as ever, but seemed not to take the same pleasure in it.

She was always noticeably at her best with Stephen, but she and Signor Manazzo came near to high words over the question of a duplicated reservation, and Jane did her best to keep well out of the way. But on the Thursday morning Martha waylaid her as she was leaving the Ursellos'.

"Look here, Jane Graydon, Stephen let it out that he took you to the ballet and I can see with my own eyes that you're doing your best to attract him. Well, no one else will tell you you're making yourself cheap, so——"

Jane stared at her, momentarily speechless. She had a temper, though it was usually well under control, and the almost coarse words caught her on the raw.

"Really I don't think you should speak to me like that. I went to the ballet because Stephen asked me, and——"

"After you'd angled for the invitation, no doubt, helped by the fact that I was ill. I knew there'd be trouble before you'd been two days in Genoa. Maureen was engaged and wasn't interested in anyone but her John. But you're young and attractive and trying out your wings. Well——"

"Please stop it at once!" Jane said in a very low voice. "I didn't—I'm not—I like Stephen quite well, but I never tried to attract him. He was kind when I was lonely, which is more than you were once you'd brought me here. I said I wouldn't go to the ballet, but I couldn't be rude and he'd got the seats especially." How could she possibly say that she didn't want more than friendship from Stephen and not even that if it would hurt Martha?

"Stephen and I——" Martha said and stopped. One or two people were glancing at her white face curiously. Jane's temper suddenly died, for she recognized that Martha was really suffering. When she was busy and happy she had a pale attractiveness, but just now she looked much older than her age and almost haggard.

"I guessed that you liked Stephen," Jane said quietly and awkwardly. "I never for a moment wanted to—to—I'm not that kind of person. I've never thought about men much. I only wanted to travel."

Martha laughed harshly.

"All girls think of men. They all want to marry. I love my work, but still—I'm almost twenty-three and

I've got no home or relatives. Stephen's almost a year older. He's bound to marry soon. Until you came——"

Jane thought desperately, for she hated the whole embarrassing conversation. Her mother would have thought it in abominable taste.

"I don't want to marry," she said. "Not for years and years. I haven't seen any of the places I want to see nor had any of the experiences I'd like, apart from coming to Genoa. It may be queer of me—I think the other girls thought so at the Silver Shell—but that's the truth. I like just being alive and learning to be independent. Last year I was still at my Commercial College. I like getting to know people—any people. Mr. Morrison, Signor Manazzo, Dick Billingly and Stephen. There's no more to it than that."

Martha walked for some distance in complete silence, then she said:

"I don't believe you know what it's like—loving someone who doesn't really care at all."

"Perhaps I don't," Jane admitted soberly. "Or—or I'm only just beginning to understand. I'm sorry, Martha. None of it's my fault. But I can't be rude to Stephen."

Martha made a queer little sound and turned abruptly into a shop.

"I'm going to buy some cigarettes. Go on without me."

Much shaken, Jane hurried on to the Blue Dragon and met Dick Billingly on the doorstep. He took one look at her face and asked:

"What's the matter? Something been upsetting you?"

Before she had time to think Jane was trying to explain. She felt that he was to be trusted and he might be able to advise her.

"I've no one to talk to and I feel awful. It's Martha . . . She said . . . I went to the ballet with Stephen last week and now she hates me."

"She's jealous," he said immediately. "Stephen likes you and Martha's always been rather set on him. Poor girl, she makes it so obvious. We've all found it embarrassing, but Stephen's been the soul of tact. And he really does like her in a friendly way. Of course they've been thrown together at work for quite a time."

"But, I suppose, if it wasn't for me——"

"He'd more or less stopped taking her out. She knows plenty of people in Genoa. Don't you worry, Jane. It's difficult, but there's not much you can do."

"I only want to be ordinarily friendly with Stephen," said Jane and wondered gloomily if he believed her. How difficult being grown-up and far from home was turning out to be! She couldn't shout from the house-tops that Stephen meant very little to her.

She gave it up and went to get ready for the day's work, and when Martha appeared, to Jane's relief, she was composed and apparently her usual self.

"It seems to me it's *better* to stay independent," Jane thought, as she settled down to sort the post. "Anything else makes one so restless and—and vulnerable. But—I wonder when I shall see Andrea again?"

For at the end of the previous week she had had a note from Andrea Lerrante, which she was still carrying about

in her bag. He wrote that he and his father were going to Rome on business and might be away for a week. When he returned he hoped that it would be possible for them to meet. It was no more than a friendly note, but Jane had read it many times.

Meanwhile letters to her mother were hard to write, and she mostly confined herself to the Blue Dragon news and the fact that she liked the Ursellos and had settled down well. Sooner or later, perhaps, she would have to face the issue, but the future seemed anything but clear and she found herself waiting in an unusual state of uncertainty. If Martha could only have known that it was not Stephen who occupied her thoughts she might have felt happier.

Meanwhile, perhaps fortunately, Jane's interest in her work grew and each day she felt that she knew more and was better able to help all the people who came into the office. As she stopped feeling flustered and unsure of herself behind the counter she increasingly enjoyed the contacts with so many widely differing people. But sometimes whole days passed without her having a chance to be in the outer office. She was only the junior; the girl who was learning her job and who got all the little tasks. But she *was* learning, that much was obvious. Mr. Morrison said on Saturday morning:

"You're doing very well, my dear. I've written to tell the London office how satisfied I am with you. I do like to see keenness."

So Jane glowed and went home after lunch feeling that there was not much danger of her being sent back to

England before September. Then she was almost certain to have to go, for the office was not very busy during the winter. Mr. Morrison, Signor Manazzo, Martha and Stephen were likely to carry on without extra help. Dick Billingly, who hoped to return permanently to London, would not be replaced until the early spring.

She had made no definite plans for the afternoon, though Stephen had asked her to go to Pegli to bathe. She had put him off by saying that she had letters to write and sewing that must be done, but, as she reached the Ursellos', she began to regret it. Stephen had looked hurt and, after all, it was no fun being alone all week-end. Perhaps she could go along to Camogli by train. Fast ones often stopped there and it was only quite a short distance.

But Signora Ursello met her, all smiles. A gentleman had just telephoned and had said he would do so again in about half an hour's time. He was most anxious to speak to her—very, very anxious:

"Oh!" cried Jane, blushing under the kind, eager eyes. "Did he give his name?"

Alas no, but he was Italian, and such a charming voice. Signora Ursello's face was alight with pleasure.

She called Jane down twenty minutes later and then left her alone in the entrance hall.

Andrea's voice, speaking in English, sounded oddly unfamiliar, as voices sometimes do on the telephone.

"Jane? Or would you prefer Giovanna? I wonder if you could come out for a drive this afternoon?" I thought

we might perhaps go to Paraggi or San Michele and bathe, as it's so warm."

"Yes, thank you. I—I should like that very much." But Jane felt the same surge of panic that she had felt at Camogli. He suddenly seemed a stranger.

When he arrived, in a red sports car, he still seemed strange and she was very shy, but as they sped eastwards Jane gradually relaxed. Andrea talked about Rome and his father and told her that Maddalena was planning to ask her to dinner very soon.

"Just a quiet family dinner, you understand."

"But—oh, but——" Jane faltered, glad that her eyes were hidden behind sun-glasses. "Your family can't want me——"

He gave her a thoughtful glance and a large American car hooted noisily, so that he immediately gave his whole attention to the road.

"Why not? Let's have it! I feel sure that you're a truthful person."

"It's obvious," Jane said rapidly. "I'm not their sort. I'm young and not well off, and they can't approve of my—my working in Genoa."

"My mother's a very good judge of character," he said gravely, though there was a faint smile round his mouth. "She liked you and admired your courage. And then Maddalena and Desda want to see you again. I think Mother feels that Maddalena, who is restless just now, may settle down if she has an English friend."

Then he talked about other things until they had sped through Rota and were speeding down the steep road

towards the Golfo di Rapallo, which was almost unbelievably blue in the sun.

"I thought you'd like San Michele because it's small and quiet. Bathing has barely started, but I've telephoned to say we will require two bathing-huts. I've got," he said, "the English habit of bathing when it's hot enough. And in a day or two it will be June."

San Michele dreamed in the sun; a little beach, some coloured buildings and one or two small cafés with bright awnings and umbrellas. A short distance away there was another tiny bay, much more utilitarian, where shabby old houses were festooned with the inevitable washing, children played on the grass above the shore and men were placidly tarring the framework of a boat.

"I love that!" said Jane, nodding towards a little group—a very old woman in shabby black, who was bending over a pool with three brown-skinned, almost naked children. All looked completely absorbed and happy.

Andrea nodded.

"Yes. The very old and the very young, and ... happy! Shall we go back to the other beach and bathe, then?"

The water was much warmer than it had been at Camogli and clear green above the rocks a little distance from the village. They swam quite far out and trod water to look back at the peaceful scene and Jane was so happy that she could have shouted and sung. But that would only have amused Andrea and she was still shy, a little doubtful of him and of herself.

Afterwards they lay for a long time in the sun, not

talking much. But by the time the shadows were beginning to fall over San Michele she was so soaked in warmth and the strange happiness that she talked naturally and well.

They had dinner in Santa Margherita, on the balcony of a hotel that overlooked the water, and Jane was thankful that she had put on a frock that stayed fresh and crisp to the end of the day. Driving back to Genoa after dark he talked again of his family, which suited her very well. She so badly wanted to know as much as she could about them. Maddalena with her lively interest in other countries and her gift for languages, Desda's prettiness and obvious gifts, his father and mother and the remote, rather frightening grandfather.

"Desda's working hard at her English in honour of you," he said. "Mother approves of that, too. Desda's been lazy so far as work is concerned, though she delights in dancing and drawing. She says it's not the same talking to you in French when you come from London."

He dropped her in the busy road outside the Ursellos' and just for a moment their eyes met, as they had done under the vines at Camogli.

"Good night, Jane," he said quietly.

Jane would have been glad to go straight to her room, but Signora Ursello looked out of her own quarters and invited her in for coffee. Her husband was in his shirt-sleeves, reading a newspaper, and he greeted her with such pleasure that Jane felt a rush of warmth. They were so kind, so eager to make her feel at home. Not for the first time she was sorry that they had lost their only son in the war.

"And now tell us," said Signora Ursello, pouring out her excellent coffee. "You had a good day? When you came I thought, 'Ah, a nice girl and quite pretty!' But now I say, 'Very pretty!'"

Jane told them briefly about her day and then turned the conversation towards the Blue Dragon. It was easier.

As the happiness of that Saturday began to fade Jane was once more a prey to guilt. She told herself that she should have the courage and honesty to end all contact with the Lerrante family immediately, before any real harm was done. It was what she had told herself all along, but now the very thought was a knife in her heart.

Give up all chance of being Maddalena's friend, of having a charming little cousin like Desda, of seeing Andrea and getting to know him better! Sometimes the problem went round and round in her head so endlessly that she felt sick and lethargic, but she managed not to let it intrude on her during her working hours.

There were two alternatives that she could see and neither of them seemed likely to bear desirable fruit. The first was appealing directly to her mother to release her from her promise and telling the whole story as honestly as possible. But every time Jane thought of that she remembered her mother's bitterness and her total withdrawal from her early life. She could only hate the very thought of Jane visiting the Villa Lerrante and growing intimate with her brother's children. She could only, surely, see it as a betrayal? And yet—Jane felt helplessly that she had never really known her mother; she had

never seemed warm and ordinary and uncomplicated like other people's mothers. Perhaps she *would* forgive. Perhaps there was a side of her that would be deeply glad to find the old family trouble patched up. But it was only in the middle of the night, waking briefly to her problem, that she thought that.

The other alternative was to tell her father the truth in confidence and ask his advice. Perhaps he would agree to approach her mother. Jane loved her father, but there was no doubt that her mother was the dominating personality. He would never risk hurting and displeasing her, even for Jane's sake. Besides, he would think it only a matter of a lost friendship with Maddalena and little Desda. He could never know, because Jane felt herself incapable of putting her feelings into written words, that his daughter felt a growing bond between herself and Andrea Lerrante.

No, it was hopeless. There was no help anywhere. All she could do would be to look for the courage to end the association. But when, a few days later, she received a visit at the Blue Dragon office from Maddalena, bearing an invitation from Signora Lerrante, Jane found herself accepting it.

"We will be so pleased to have you," Maddalena said warmly, glancing round the outer office with eager curiosity. It was only half-past two and the office was not open to the public. "Grandfather will be out, we think, and"—she smiled mischievously—"that's an advantage. Grandfather isn't an easy person. Sometimes it's so difficult to be fond of him."

Her visit, and the invitation that Jane could not keep secret, caused a mild sensation amongst the younger members of the Blue Dragon staff.

"Go to the Lerrante place!" cried Martha, speaking to Jane for the first time for days. "Well, I'd sooner you than me! But then you're the kind who likes to fly high."

Jane ignored the jibe, and indeed, as Saturday drew nearer, she heartily agreed with at least part of Martha's caustic speech. Anyone, anyone could go to the Villa Lerrante in her place! Lunch or tea would have been pleasant, but dinner sounded altogether too formidable. Even with Andrea and his sisters there. . . .

"I'd hoped you'd come out for the afternoon and evening," said Stephen, looking at her almost wistfully. He had asked her to have lunch with him on the Friday and Jane, disregarding Martha, had agreed. She couldn't easily keep on avoiding Stephen.

"Oh, Stephen, I'm honestly scared! I wish I needn't go!"

"That Andrea Lerrante is a very handsome chap" Stephen remarked, without any apparent emphasis. "Pleasant, too, I believe. It's the old man who's got the reputation for being a difficult character."

"He'll be out," said Jane.

But when Andrea came to fetch her in the red sports car he told her that his grandfather would be at home.

"Don't mind the old man. If you stand up to him, Giovanna, he'll eat out of your hand, to use the descriptive English phrase."

"I'll try," Jane said, trying not to show how scared

she felt. At least there was a feeling of warmth in her heart because he had called her "Giovanna" in that intimate tone.

"You look beautiful. He likes attractive women around him. That was partly why he so bitterly resented losing his lovely daughter. She was Giovanna, too, by the way."

Jane could not bring herself to answer, and a few minutes later they reached the villa.

And, after all, the first minutes were not very alarming. Maddalena took her up to her room and then there were drinks out on the balcony. Desda danced up and down, excited because she was being allowed to stay up late, and their father, who was startlingly like Andrea, was so welcoming that Jane felt at ease.

The old man did not appear until they were going into the dining-room and then Jane was struck by his frailty. He was probably not really so very old, but ill-health, and perhaps ill-temper, had taken their toll of him.

He stared at Jane quite fiercely and yet there was a flicker of appreciation in his eyes.

"Well, Miss Jane Graydon! It's you who have bewitched Desda so that she'll study English! I don't hold much brief for the British—generally speaking an unlovable race—but I believe languages to be important." His own English was obviously fluent.

Jane faced him, suddenly not afraid. He might be rich and important, but he looked very tired. Every line on his deeply marked face showed that he had not found life a happy experience.

"I think that languages are important, too. But I'm sorry that you find the British so unlovable."

He gave a harsh laugh.

"Generally speaking, don't forget. I find myself at times liking individuals."

"There was one individual whom he had never liked, Jane thought, and that was her mother's long-dead first husband. Was it perhaps in this very room that he and his daughter had parted?

It was already growing dusk and the room was softly lighted. The table was beautiful with glass and flowers, and the meal, so quietly and skilfully served, was the most delicious Jane had ever tasted. She wished that she could give her full attention to each course, but she dared not relax for a moment. Sometimes the conversation was in English, sometimes in Italian. Andrea said little, but when she met his eyes he looked cheerful and absolutely untroubled.

It seemed that the old man was disinclined to be silent and he set himself out to make Jane talk. Perhaps he wished to discomfit her—Jane half-suspected that to be the case. At all events it curiously sharpened her wits and she answered him well and clearly.

At the end of the meal he rose and said:

"No coffee, thank, you. I'm going to my room." He gave Jane a last sharp look. "You must know your own mind, one sees, but you have good manners. Most Englishwomen are entirely without grace." And then he went away.

"My father says always what he thinks," said the

younger man a trifle apologetically. "You must not mind him, my dear."

"No, of course not," Jane said, confused.

"She needn't mind him," Andrea said calmly. "For he approved of her. All the same, manners are not *his* strong point."

"Andrea!" said his mother, frowning, and Andrea laughed.

After coffee on the balcony, with all the many scents from the garden filling the air, Maddalena and Desda bore Jane away.

"I wish to draw you, please, Jane!" Desda begged.

"Then you must show me your statues first," Jane retorted. "Remember I haven't seen them."

So Desda brought her sketching block and showed her work and Jane was deeply impressed. The drawings were so assured and finely executed for so young a child.

While Maddalena and Jane talked Desda drew rapidly, but she would not part with the portrait when it was finished.

"If you come again I draw a different one—for you. This I keep, if you please."

"If you come again——" Jane remembered the child's words when at last she was back in her own room. Her face felt burning hot and her thoughts were racing. Life had never been so fascinating and so deeply disturbing.

FOURTEEN

Blue Dragon Happenings

ONCE MORE, WHEN MONDAY MORNING CAME, Jane threw herself into life at the Blue Dragon. Looking back, it seemed that she had never been bored since her first day in the office, or at least she had never felt the deadly, soul-destroying boredom that had so often swamped her spirit at the Silver Shell. If only Martha had been more friendly she would have been very happy; as it was the only thing she could do was to avoid Martha as much as possible, and it wasn't easy in so comparatively small a space.

Martha had said no more about Stephen, indeed she said little to Jane on any subject, barring necessary exchanges regarding the work, but in a hundred little ways she seemed to try to belittle the younger girl.

She frequently made biting asides, or capped something Jane had said with a remark meant to be disparaging. If she had a chance to make Jane look small, such as showing up a mistake, she took it at once. The knowledge that Martha was watching her, ready to pounce, put Jane on her toes and she tried her hardest not to make mistakes at all.

All the tours that came out from London were now fully booked and occasionally there was an extra one, arriving on a Wednesday. But Jane did not have much to do with them, beyond dealing with the correspondence. It was always Dick, Stephen or Martha who went to the station to receive the new arrivals and to see that the Blue Dragon coach was waiting to take them to the hotel on the Corso Aurelio Saffi, and they, too, who went to the hotel to see the tour off on its start along the Riviera and down to Rome.

But during the week following Jane's visit to the Lerrantes Martha was once more off with a bad headache, and Signor Manazzo was also ill again. It made things very awkward on the Friday and at the end of the day Mr. Morrison called Jane into his office.

"Miss Graydon, do you think you could meet the tour in the morning? Martha has just sent a message to say that she won't be able to be at the station at eight o'clock. Unfortunately her head is still bad and she seems very unwell. Mr. Billingly has stayed late every night this week and Mr. Moorhouse is dealing with another matter for me at nine o'clock and might not be back in time. I'm sure you can manage perfectly well and help to keep up the Blue Dragon's good name!"

"I'll do my best," Jane promised, feeling much honoured.

"The courier can really do all that's necessary, but we make a point of meeting the train, as you know, and accompanying the people to the hotel to make sure that all is well." Then, if there's any difficulty, you can report

it here as soon as the office opens. The courier, poor man, needs a wash and his breakfast as much as anyone else after a night journey."

"Yes, of course."

"Antonio is driving the coach on this next tour. He brought one tour back last night, as you know. He'll be there with the coach at eight, and as usual there'll be a drive round Genoa tomorrow afternoon for those who want to go. Don't forget to collect enough porters, will you? There shouldn't be any difficulties, but sometimes one finds that people have been ill on the journey or are a little dissatisfied. Some people," he added with a sigh, "seem to *look* for difficulties. We do try to make everything go smoothly. The courier is Mr. Jones—that little dark Welshman who's called in here several times."

"Yes, he's nice," said Jane. "I'll try and see that everyone's happy."

The next morning she was awake early and her breakfast arrived, as arranged, at a quarter past seven. By a quarter to eight she was on her way to the station, wearing a neat dark linen dress and a little white hat and gloves. She hoped fervently that she looked older and more responsible than she felt. What if there *was* someone ill, or someone who hadn't got the sleeping accommodation they'd expected? What if Mr. Jones was hoping to turn the trouble over to Martha's calm efficiency? Not that he wasn't efficient himself, but Jane knew enough about tours already to have realized that it was generally the women who were difficult. What if there was some elderly, bad-tempered old girl——?

She gave herself a little shake and walked briskly into the station. Now it was familiar enough, for she often dropped in to watch train departures or even to have a meal in the restaurant, which she had found to be good.

She collected the necessary porters, who smiled at her and assured her that all would be well. The train would arrive on time and the Blue Dragon luggage should be put into the coach with the minimum of delay.

"*Si, si, Signora!*" they said. "Everything will go well." Perhaps they saw that she was nervous.

Jane felt a faint thrill of excitement as she waited on the platform for the express to appear. Once she had arrived as a stranger, and now she was there to welcome other strangers. She now walked the streets and squares and each dark *galleria* with confidence and spoke Italian, if not like a native, at least with reasonable fluency.

The train came in with a rush, lifting her hair. She saw Mr. Jones' dark Welsh face at a window and signalled to him, walking beside the train as it slowed to a halt.

"Miss Longland is ill and couldn't come," she said rapidly as Mr. Jones alighted. "So Mr. Morrison asked me if I would. Is everything all right?"

"A sick child," said the Welshman equally rapidly. "A bad traveller, unfortunately, but the mother says she'll get used to it. Everyone's rather annoyed. They say such a young child should never have been brought on a tour. She's been sick twice in the corridor and the people on either side were disturbed in the night."

"Oh, the poor kid!" Jane cried. "Where is she?"

The members of the tour were climbing quickly out of

the train, some of them fussing loudly about their luggage. The porters were already at hand and the sleeping-car attendant was swinging cases out of the windows. Most of the people seemed middle-aged or elderly and some looked very tired.

Jane tried to greet each one, saying clearly that the coach was waiting and they would be at their hotel in twenty minutes. The mother of the child came last; a young, fair woman, who looked troubled and weary. The little girl was not more than four or five and she was crying dismally.

The mother's face brightened when Jane greeted her in friendly fashion and asked the child's name.

"Oh, her name's Margaret. She'll really be all right soon. We had a rough Channel crossing and the train just put the finishing touch to it. And some people have been so unpleasant——" She looked with some bitterness at the others, who were beginning to move up the platform. "I was sick myself on the boat, and——"

"You'll feel better when you've had a proper wash and some breakfast," Jane said, taking the child's hand. After a moment the hot, sticky fingers closed on hers.

After one or two alarms it was found that all the luggage was definitely there and Antonio and the porters stowed it away in the coach. Jane saw everyone settled and then climbed in herself, taking Margaret on her knee.

"Soon you'll see the sea and it'll be very blue."

"I couldn't come without her," the mother explained. "I'm a widow and I've been saving up to come broad."

But with all these old pussies—though that man over there was very kind, and the courier did all he could.”

By the time the coach turned in at the gates of the hotel there was faint colour in Margaret’s cheeks and she had exclaimed eagerly at the sight of the water.

“You’re so kind,” said her mother. “I never thought we’d be met like this by an English girl. Foreigners aren’t the same, are they?”

The new arrivals were installed in their rooms without a hitch, and Jane had a few words with the proprietor and was just leaving when Mr. Jones appeared again.

“Everything O.K., I think, Miss Graydon. And let me tell you,” he added, in his faintly Welsh voice, “that Miss Longland would never have sat with that poor kid on her knee. A hard one is Miss Longland, and a spinster born, if you ask me!”

Oh, poor Martha! Jane, pausing above the sea before going to the Blue Dragon office, turned over his words. Oddly enough they had some truth in them. Martha *was* hard, and there was often something curiously spinsterish about her. And yet Martha so longed to get married and certainly had a capacity for suffering.

“People,” thought Jane, not being able to resist a glance towards the Villa Lerrante, “really are interesting—but queer.”

Then she took a deep breath of the sea air and caught a tram that would take her near enough to the Blue Dragon. Her Saturday morning commission had been safely executed and now it was time for more humdrum work.

She reached the office very early, but found Mr. Morrison already there, with a letter in his hand.

"Oh, Miss Graydon! Jane, I mean. We really mustn't stand on ceremony with you, must we, when we mostly use Christian names? This letter is from Mr. Crayne, the London Manager. He's coming out here for a few days, arriving on Monday morning. He'll be here for a day and then he's going on to Rome."

"Oh!" cried Jane and her heart leaped. They exchanged looks.

"Everything must go smoothly on Monday," said Mr. Morrison.

On Monday morning both Signor Manazzo and Martha were back and everyone settled down to the day's work. Jane did the flowers, put out the new folders, and then went into the inner office to start sorting the post. Mr. Crayne, it appeared, was having breakfast at a hotel and would not be along until the middle of the morning.

She had not got very far with the post when Mr. Morrison sought her out.

"Oh, Jane, you seem to have got on all right on Saturday. I wondered if you'd go and see the tour leave? I can't really spare the others this morning, with Mr. Crayne expected. If there's any trouble you can telephone, but probably there'll be no need. These papers have to go to Mr. Jones—the hotel reservations and so on. Put them in an envelope, please."

Jane found one of the quarto envelopes used to post

folders to inquirers and put the papers carefully inside. Then she powdered her nose, smoothed her frock, and found her hat, bag and gloves.

"Where are you off to?" Stephen asked, as she went into the outer office.

"The Hotel Rosa. Mr. Morrison has asked me to go. With Mr. Crayne expected——"

"We're all on show? Oh, well, it'll give you a breath of air."

"Jane!" It was Mr. Morrison's voice, and Jane hastily dropped bag, gloves and envelope on the counter and hurried back.

"Yes, Mr. Morrison?"

"I've got some personal letters I forgot to post. Wait a minute——" He groped in his pockets. "Yes, here they are, if you'd be so kind. Oh, and did you look up that file I asked for? Well, if you wouldn't mind before you go——"

Jane found the file, then snatched up her possessions again and walked briskly out into the Via Balbi. It was a wonderful summer morning, though probably Mrs. Morrison was suffering in the heat. The sky was cloudless and the sun blazed down on her white hat. A hat, Jane had decided on Saturday, gave one a little extra dignity.

At the Hotel Rosa she found the coach already waiting and some of the members of the tour grouped on the steps. Mr. Jones greeted her with a smile.

"Well, it's Miss Graydon again! We're almost ready to be off, I think, except for a few stragglers. There's

never a tour when *someone* doesn't make us late. By the way, the child's all right now."

"Oh, good!" And Jane turned to greet the mother and the little girl. Margaret looked pink and cheerful.

"Here's the nice girl!" she cried shrilly and a number of people laughed.

Jane handed over the envelope.

"These are your papers."

Mr. Jones took the envelope and, with it still in his hand, began to see people into the coach. Antonio, grinning, was cleaning the windscreen.

Still three people were missing.

"I'm sure I don't know what will happen when we have a seven o'clock start," Mr. Jones grumbled. "But then it's always the same." Leaning against the coach he put his hand into the envelope and out came a handful of travel literature. Jane stared and he looked astonished.

"Well, and what is this we have here? A street map of Florence, and——"

"It's wrong!" Jane gasped, feeling suddenly a little sick. "I put the papers into the envelope myself."

Mr. Jones dropped a pamphlet about Rome and said something softly to himself. At that moment the missing three appeared on the steps, one of them, an elderly woman, vowing that she was sure she had left half her things behind. Antonio climbed into the driving seat.

"I'll have to go back!" Jane cried wildly. "It's the wrong envelope. Oh, I'm sorry, but I don't know *how* it happened!"

Mr. Jones gave her a soothing pat on the arm.

"Don't get so upset, dear girl. What's a little more delay? Jump into the coach and we'll go round by the Via Balbi."

"I suppose it's the only way," Jane said frantically. "But I just don't see——"

She was tense and upset as the coach moved through the traffic and stopped outside the Blue Dragon office. She leaped out, clutching the offending envelope, and pushed her way through the swing door.

As it happened the office was nearly empty of the public and Martha, Stephen and Dick were occupied in various ways behind the counter. Signor Manazzo was not in sight, but right in Jane's path stood Mr. Morrison, talking to a tall and slightly familiar man—Mr. Crayne, whom Jane had met once in London.

Mr. Morrison seemed surprised to see her looking so hot and upset, and more surprised still when he noticed the coach outside.

"Jane—Miss Graydon! What's happened?"

"I'm so sorry! I took the wrong papers," Jane gulped. "I left the envelope with my bag and gloves while I got that file for you, and—and——"

"Well, find the correct ones," Mr. Morrison said with unusual testiness. "We can't keep the coach waiting in this busy street."

"I'll have a word with the driver and courier," Mr. Crayne said, nodding to the flustered Jane.

She hurled herself behind the counter.

"But my envelope! Has anyone seen an envelope like this?"

"Dozens of them, I'm afraid," said Stephen, who looked troubled on Jane's behalf.

"But I left it on the counter——" Jane was peering everywhere; under the counter, under piles of papers.

"Here!" cried Martha, at her elbow. "Don't make hay of the whole place. *We* can't help it if you lose something."

"But——" Then Jane gave a sharp cry and pounced on a full envelope that was just visible under the telephone directory. "Here it is! How on earth did it get *there*?"

"I suppose you put it there," said Martha. "No one's used the telephone book, so far as I know."

"Well, take it out to Mr. Jones," said Mr. Morrison. "I wouldn't have had this happen for the world. Not in front of Mr. Crayne."

"Oh, neither would I," Jane said huskily. It would have been easy to burst into tears. She wanted to stamp her foot and assure them all that *she* hadn't put the envelope under the telephone directory. But instead she went with as much dignity as she could muster out to the coach and gave the papers to Mr. Jones, who gave her a friendly wink in return, as though to show there was no ill-feeling.

The coach went off and Jane, weak at the knees and no longer so well groomed, flung aside her hat and gloves and miserably powered her nose in the deserted inner office.

Oh, *why* had such a thing happened in front of Mr. Crayne? How had it happened?

When she was sent for she went very slowly, but Mr. Crayne was smiling.

"Don't look so upset, my dear. These little mistakes will happen, and I believe it's almost your first. I've been hearing an excellent report of you and if you continue to do so well we'll certainly keep you with us. Not here in Genoa after the middle of September, but perhaps in England for the winter. And then next year——" He made a gesture as though to indicate that anything might happen.

"Oh, thank you!" Jane cried. "But I really am terribly sorry about the papers."

"Forget about them, and so will we." And Mr. Crayne looked inquiringly at Mr. Morrison, who smiled.

"Of course. Of course. She's a very good girl."

"I suppose you got hauled over the coals?" Martha asked, as Jane appeared in the outer office, and there was something in her tone that made Jane look at her closely. Stephen, too, was staring thoughtfully, turning away from the people at the counter.

"No," Jane said slowly. "I didn't. Mr. Crayne was very nice."

She disliked herself for her suspicions, but undoubtedly Martha had been nearer to her things than anyone else when she went back to speak to Mr. Morrison. It hurt and bewildered her even to suspect that another woman could do such a thing.

FIFTEEN

Jane in Despair

VERY LITTLE MORE WAS SAID ABOUT JANE'S trouble of the morning, but at the end of the day Stephen waylaid her and insisted on taking her to have a cup of tea.

"It's been quite a day, what with one thing and another! Mr. Morrison always gets fussed if anyone important visits us. Look here, Jane! How did you come to lose that envelope?"

Jane stared at him miserably.

"I don't know, Stephen. I put it down with my gloves and bag when Mr. Morrison called me back, and when I returned they seemed just as I'd left them. I certainly didn't put the envelope anywhere else."

Stephen was silent for quite a time, looking into his cup.

"You—can't think of an explanation?"

Jane felt herself growing scarlet and refused to meet his eyes.

"No."

"You think it was Martha," he said slowly. "And so

do I. But we can't prove it, so it's better to say no more."

Jane much distressed, took a too large gulp of the hot weak tea.

"Oh, Stephen, surely she wouldn't? Even though——"

"She might," he said unwillingly. "She's a ruthless type and she's jealous of you. Partly because—because I like you, and partly because you're doing so well."

"But Martha knows everything and I *am* only the junior."

"But you've proved you've got common sense, and travel sense, too. Martha isn't the kind who ever likes other women much. On the whole she gets on with men much better, except for Signor Manazzo. Only the poor girl's trouble is that she tries too hard and so makes herself unappealing." He looked at Jane's down-bent face. "You don't like me talking like this, but it's true. And you're honest enough to know it. Oh, Jane, I wish—but there's someone else, isn't there?"

Once again Jane blushed fiercely, but she met his eyes.

"I'm sorry Stephen. There isn't really anyone else. At least it's hopeless——"

"How do you know?" he asked brusquely. "He's a nice chap and I don't believe he plays around. I saw you going down the Via Garibaldi in his red car on Saturday evening."

"It was only for an hour." But the memory of that pleasant hour had been with Jane even in her misery that day.

Stephen said, "Humph!" and finished his tea.

"Well never mind. We'll both forget what we suspect of Martha. You've got two little frown lines and it spoils your pretty forehead. I like you to look happy."

For a wild moment Jane thought of telling him the whole truth and asking his advice. But her promise had included everyone in Italy, even though Stephen would be discreet and would keep her secret. The Lerrantes were her own problem and there was no way out of it. As for Martha——

But for the rest of the week Martha was reasonably pleasant and there were times when Jane forgot her suspicions. Mr. Crayne had gone on to Rome and things were as usual in the Blue Dragon office, except that they were busier than ever on the Friday and Saturday mornings.

Jane had been asked to tea at the Villa Lerrante on the Saturday afternoon, but when the office closed at half-past twelve Maddalena was waiting for Jane in the Via Balbi.

"I am so sorry, and Desda is so disappointed, but there is trouble at home."

"Oh, dear!" Jane looked quickly at her face. "Something awful?"

"Well, not unexpected, but yes. Grandfather had a slight stroke a year ago and last night he had another one. He is quite helpless. The doctors say he may live for some time, but——"

"Oh, I'm so terribly sorry!" Jane could not imagine the grim old man helpless and dependent.

Maddalena said gravely:

"It's never been easy to love Grandfather. We all fear him a little—more than a little. But still it is terrible. So, you see, today will not be possible——"

"Of course not. I quite understand."

Maddalena glanced quickly down the street.

"My father is at the Palazzo and soon will be leaving. I have very little time. But Andrea sends you a message. He wishes you to go with him to Camogli this afternoon and sail in his boat. He'll call for you at three o'clock if it is convenient."

"Oh, but——"

Maddalena gave her a shrewd and very friendly look.

"Andrea likes you, Jane, and Desda and I are so pleased. Andrea has never cared much for any girl."

"Oh!" Jane didn't know what to say. "But can he get away today? Ought we to go sailing?"

"There are nurses and nothing can be done. This may go on for a long time. Andrea is not the kind to sit beside a bed and Grandfather wouldn't wish it. He and Andrea have never got on very well. Yes, go sailing and be happy."

"Couldn't you come, too?"

"No, for I'm to go out with my mother. There is the car! Good-bye, Jane!" And Maddalena hurried away towards the familiar blue car.

Jane ate little lunch and got herself ready for the outing in a state of restless excitement and perturbation. "Andrea likes you!" Oh, if only it were true! But then the problem would only be intensified.

"I ought to have kept away from them from the first,"

thought poor Jane. "I'm only getting what I deserve. If I'd been honest——"

But in Andrea's company she lost her tension and was soon talking naturally. It was good to see Camogli again in that blazing June heat and fun to be on board the red and white boat. Andrea used the engine to get them out of the crowded harbour, but away from the shore there was quite a wind—a hot wind that lifted Jane's hair—and he began to raise the sails.

As Jane had told him, she had learned to sail on the Norfolk Broads, amongst all the hazards of shallows and thick beds of reeds, and it was the deepest pleasure to be handling ropes again. Soon they were speeding across the green-blue water and Andrea smiled across at her.

"I never met a girl who could sail a boat before. Except for Maddalena, that is."

They sailed right round the promontory, keeping far out, and then right across the Golfo di Rapallo. Later they swung round and sailed into Portofino harbour, that deep inlet in the rocky promontory.

Harbour and little town were crowded with week-end visitors and they did not stay, but, using the engine again, chugged round the high rocks until they reached a tiny stony beach at the foot of the tremendous cliffs. Here there was a ring for mooring the boat and not another soul anywhere in sight. They sat on the rocks and ate the picnic meal that Andrea had brought from the Villa Lerrante and then bathed in the warm sea, diving from the boat.

It was idyllic; it was perfect. With each plunge into the water Jane felt her troubles recede further and further. What did anything matter, in summer, when she was with Andrea?

In the early evening they sailed back to Camogli and had omelettes and wine at one of the little harbour restaurants. Then Andrea drove her back to Genoa. He climbed the steps with her and stood talking just within the porch. The street was brightly lighted and people and traffic passed all the time, but the house was quiet. Only a dim light burned in the entrance hall.

Suddenly Andrea took her hand and then drew her to him. For a moment his lips touched hers in a very gentle kiss.

"Good night, Jane."

Jane sat on her bed and relived those moments Andrea had kissed her! Inexperienced as she was she found herself wondering desperately how much it meant. Perhaps nothing very much; perhaps just the seal on a happy day. And yet Maddalena had said that he liked her and she herself always had the feeling that there was something strong and important between them.

Oh, what was to be done? The old man might be dying. Would he perhaps suddenly long to see his daughter again? Would he ask for her and set all the Lerrante money and power to finding her?

But Jane told herself not to be a romantic fool. That sort of thing only happened in old-fashioned romances. If old Signor Lerrante had not yearned for his daughter

in more than twenty years he was certainly not the kind of man to weaken at the hour of his death, or so Jane was pretty sure. It was a pity, though.

But even if he *had* wanted his Giovanna, and even if Giovanna had been traced, there was always the question of whether she would be willing to see him again. And Jane very much doubted if her mother would soften now. And, if she did come, that wouldn't really solve any problems; it would merely show Jane herself up as dishonest and the Lerrantes might hate her for finding her way into their home.

Though why they should, when they apparently liked her for herself, Jane could not quite see. As Jane Graydon, they had accepted her with kindness and friendliness; as a relation—a grandchild, a niece and a cousin—

“Oh, I'm going to bed!” And Jane went, willing sleep that refused to come until two in the morning.

The old man lingered on between life and death, and around his rooms in the big villa was a deep quiet. But for the rest, the Lerrantes went about their daily lives; there was nothing else to be done, as Maddalena told Jane on the telephone, when things might go on like that for weeks or even months.

Andrea was busy at the shipping office and Jane only saw him briefly one evening, but he asked her to go out the next Saturday. They went to San Michele again and bathed, regretting that the little place was now much more crowded. For the season was gathering momentum and there were some people who preferred a tiny resort

to the noise, heat and crowds of Rapallo and Santa Margherita.

Once again they had dinner at the hotel in Santa Margherita and drove home after dark. But Andrea did not drive straight to Genoa. He stopped the car by the sea near Nervi.

"So lovely a night! It seems a pity to hurry home. Shall we walk a little?"

Jane agreed, but her legs felt weak and she seemed to be breathing with difficulty. Every instinct told her that this was the moment—the moment of truth. She had longed for it and dreaded it and it was here. Panic suddenly filled her and she would have liked to run away. All her guilt and doubt welled up and she would have given almost anything never to have set eyes on any single member of the Lerrante family. Only at that thought her heart seemed pierced with pain. Never to have met Andrea!

Avoiding the crowds, they sat down on an empty seat under the trees and Jane waited for Andrea to speak. For the life of her she could not have said one word; her chest felt as though it was tightly bound.

When Andrea did speak it was to say quietly:

"Giovanna, you're very young, I know——" Then, when Jane moved, he added quickly: "You don't like being called Giovanna, do you?"

"Oh, yes." Jane got it out with difficulty. "I do."

"You're only eighteen, but in England, as in other countries, girls are sometimes married at sixteen or seventeen." He reached out and took her tense, cold

hand. "Jane, something happened between us almost as soon as we met. *You* felt it?"

"Yes." It was scarcely above a breath.

"I'm not trying to rush you, Jane dear. You're very young and you like your work, but one day—I hope not too far in the future—I want to marry you. I love you and—you love me?"

"Yes." Jane was on her feet again, but he held her hand with increased firmness. "I do. Of course I do, Andrea! But—— Oh, you don't understand! You don't understand at all! It can't happen—Never! I shouldn't ever have got to know you."

Andrea, too, stood up, but he would not release her fingers.

"But of course you should. It simply happened. We ~~either~~ of us had much to do with it. And now we're in love. Jane, don't cry. My dear, I *don't* understand——"

Jane forced her hand free and groped for a handkerchief. Long pent up strain was resulting in a burst of quite uncontrollable emotion. She shook and sobbed, leaning against him, fighting hard for composure.

"It isn't any good! You don't know—I should never have gone on seeing any of you. Only—only—— Oh, *please* take me home!"

He was a good deal the taller and he stood looking down at her bent head with a perplexed frown.

"If you cry like that you'll make yourself ill. If I don't understand then you must explain."

Jane lifted a ravaged face.

"I can't! That's the most terrible part. Oh, Andrea!"

"There's someone else in England?" he asked.

"No! No, of course not." The shock of that almost sobered Jane. "There never has—I've never loved anyone before. I can't tell you, so it's no good——"

"I think you will have to do so sooner or later," he said gravely. "Oh, Jane, I thought you were so happy

Jane began to cry again.

"I was. Oh, I was! But it was only when I didn't remember—Oh, I'm sorry! I never cry. Mother always said it was——" She stopped abruptly.

Andrea kept his arm round her shoulders as they went back to the car. Jane was composed again, but so greatly shaken that she felt drained and tired.

"Then I'll take you home, but I mean to understand."

He drove back to Genoa without another word and Jane sat drearily beside him wishing herself dead. They parted with only a brief handclasp and Jane rushed up the stairs, praying that she would not meet anyone.

She stood, dry-eyed, at the window for some time, then reached for her writing paper and, sitting on the bed, wrote a letter of confession and desperate appeal to her mother; the sort of letter she had never written in her life before. When it was finished she put it in an envelope, which she addressed and stamped. And only then did she know that not under any circumstances could she post it. Not if Andrea never came back; if he really believed that she didn't care for him at all.

Hardly knowing what she was doing by then, she thrust it amongst some books and papers on the table by

her bed and undressed and washed. She was so exhausted that she fell asleep at once, but she awoke in the night and found that the pain and despair were still there.

Sunday was a nightmare of loneliness. She neither saw nor heard from Andrea or any other member of his family, and she spent most of the time in her room, trying to read and sew but finding concentration impossible.

She was glad to go to the Blue Dragon office on Monday morning, but had not realized how greatly her face would give her away.

"Are you ill?" Stephen immediately demanded anxiously, and Jane said with heroic cheerfulness:

"Of course not. I—I had a bad headache yesterday. But it's gone now."

Half an hour later Mr. Morrison called her into his office.

"Oh, Jane! Mr. Crayne has just been on the telephone. He's leaving Rome today and going straight back to England. He had a suggestion to make about you and I said at once that I was sure you'd agree. They're very busy at the Rome office—it's a far larger office than this and they have more staff. But one way and another they're under-staffed this week and he suggests that you go today—as soon as you can be ready."

"Oh!" Jane stared at him in a bewildered way.

"It would be just for this week, and I said we could manage without you. He thought you might enjoy the change and that you might like to have some slight experience of another Blue Dragon office." Then he

seemed to notice her face for the first time. "My dear girl, are you ill? Then of course——"

But Jane had suddenly realized exactly what he was suggesting. He was offering her release from Genoa, a city that had grown unbearable. In Genoa she might see Andrea at any time, and everywhere she went, however hard she fought with herself, she would be looking for him. She was too unhappy to care that she would see Rome at last, but anything would be better than returning to her lonely room that evening, waiting for the telephone, a letter. Andrea had said that he meant to understand and she had little doubt that he would try. It would be impossible to see him again so soon.

"No, I'm not ill, Mr. Morrison, and I'd like to go."

"Then I'll ring back and tell them to expect you. There's a room provisionally booked for you at a small hotel near the station. You ask Stephen to see about your railway ticket and get off on the 10.58. Have you got enough money? It ought to be an interesting experience for you."

Five minutes later Jane found herself hurrying back towards the Piazza Acquaverde. She was going to Rome!

SIXTEEN

Jane Goes to Rome

JANE RETURNED TO HER ROOM AND PACKED A suitcase with her lightest clothes. She felt almost dazed still and it seemed impossible that by evening she would be in Rome, that city she had so longed to see. She felt a sharp stab of resentment that she must go there in her present mood, and yet the chance of escape still seemed blessed. She took a last look from her window at the wide and familiar view and thought, with a different stab, that when Andrea came—if he ever did—he would find her gone.

She went downstairs with her case and found Signora Ursello. She explained that she was going to Rome and would probably be back either Sunday evening or the following Monday morning, having travelled overnight.

"Ah, I'm glad that you'll see Rome, but it's a pity to go with such a white face and shadows under the eyes." She surveyed Jane shrewdly, not having missed the fact that the last outing with the handsome and rich young Italian had resulted in sorrow. "Have you an address?

Then if there are any letters, or anyone calls to see you——”

“No,” Jane said hastily. “I’m being met. I don’t know the name of the hotel. And it’s only for a week.”

“Yes.” And the kindly woman let her go, staring after the slim figure with appreciation. How smart she looked, so elegant in the plain dress, the little hat and the crisp gloves! The ways of love were often painful, of course, but so attractive a young girl could not be sad for long.

Meanwhile, Jane walked to the Stazione Principe, and soon after eleven o’clock, she was seated in a first-class compartment of the express, wearing her Blue Dragon badge and staring out at the villas and the sudden views of blue sea. She had often heard that one of the ~~snags~~ of the main line that ran for such a distance along the coast was that the train was in tunnels far more often than it was in full daylight, but just at the moment she didn’t care in the least if she saw nothing at all. Camogli, flashing past, was only a bitter reminder of times when she had been happy, and the same went for Santa Margherita Ligure and the beautiful Golfo di Rapallo. Was it really only such a short while since she and Andrea sailed the red and white boat across that dark blue water? It seemed in another life.

She had bought some Italian newspapers—it was odd how easy it was now to deny herself English ones—and she forced herself to read the news. Andrea might have gone for ever, her heart might be broken, but it

made no difference to the fact that she lived in Italy and needed to perfect her knowledge of the language.

On and on sped the train and now the coast was high and rocky, with few beaches. Monte Rosso, Vernazza, Corniglia, Manarola, Riomaggiore—the remote little villages of the Cinque Terre were passing, and Jane put down the papers and went to stand by the window, her hair blowing wildly and her ears deafened as the electric engine hauled the train in and out of tunnels. Here a glimpse of vineyards clinging to a sheer hillside, there a castle above a picturesque harbour. A whole village, softly coloured in the sun, clinging to a crag; a church with a small pink spire.

The quick glimpses awakened her curiosity and her old love of new places and by the time the attendant called her to the restaurant car for lunch she felt a little more like herself. The pain was still there, but it was under control so long as she kept her thoughts in order.

La Spezia was passed and after a time the thing that lifted her heart in quite its old way was the unbelievable beauty of the rocky mountains under the blue sky. Stark peaks and sheer white cliffs did not remind her of Andrea.

Italy! Oh, Italy! It was wicked to be miserable, wicked to throw away all her happiness because Andrea thought her— Well, what did he think her? But that way lay danger and she was glad soon to seek for a glimpse of the famous campanile—the leaning tower—as they approached Pisa.

After that, as the hot afternoon wore on, Livorno,* and

* Leghorn.

then, for mile on mile, the strange country that she had heard of and read about. The ancient hills of Tuscany on the left and, between the hills and the sea, low-lying marshland; pools and dykes and glimpses of birds and flowers. It drew her inexpressibly; its atmosphere penetrated even into the fast-moving train.

From Civitavecchia she stood in the corridor all the way, marvelling at the beauty of the countryside. It might have been England on any summer's day it was so flowery and soft. There were fields ablaze with poppies and what she thought of as other "English flowers".

Then Rome—in ten minutes, in five. She had washed her hands and powdered her nose and a pair of fresh white gloves was ready in her handbag. She quivered with excitement and nervousness. The platforms—with their plain concrete pillars, seemed to stretch into infinity and for a moment after leaving the train Jane stood still. Then she had passed the barrier and was making her way along the great main hall to the bookstall, where she was to be met. There were crowds everywhere, but she especially noticed the flowering trees in tubs and the fact that the restaurant had chairs of every brilliant colour, scarlet, emerald green, royal blue and yellow. She felt small and unimportant in such a vast, busy place and was suddenly quite sure that no one would meet her.

But almost at once she spied a young woman wearing the Blue Dragon badge. She was smiling and looked perfectly happy, as though meeting trains well after office hours didn't annoy her in the least.

"Miss Graydon? How do you do? I'm afraid you had a hot journey. I'm Caroline Wetherby and I've worked in the office here for two years."

"It's awfully nice of you to meet me!" Jane cried, all her fear melting. Subconsciously she had expected another Martha.

"Not a bit of it. It's nice to see you and we'll be frightfully glad of some extra help. Mr. Crayne said"—and she grinned mischievously—"that you were very young but sensible."

"Oh!" Jane remembered her last meeting with Mr. Crayne and felt grateful.

Her companion was leading the way.

"Look, I'll carry your case. It isn't worth bothering with a porter as it's a light one and your hotel is only a very short distance away. Yes, isn't the station marvellous? For weeks after I arrived I used to spend all my spare time here, simply gaping! The Blue Dragon place is just through there, part of the station really, but I'll call for you in the morning. I have a tiny flat not far from here."

Outside the evening sunlight was still extremely hot and there seemed to be even more trolley-buses than in Genoa. Jane blinked in the light, staring round the great square, but her companion hurried her on, crossing over to the left and diving into a street lined with very high buildings. The hotel was in a side street that was very narrow and shadowy. It had a restaurant on the ground floor, with a few tables on the pavement, and Jane's room was three floors up. It, too, was shadowy, for the

shutters were almost closed, but Caroline pushed them wide.

"Not much of a view, I'm afraid, but it's fairly quiet. The noise of Rome can be unbelievable!"

Jane had now sunk into a state of dreamy tiredness. So much had happened in so short a time that she felt she would never know herself again, that she would never be the Jane Graydon who had so light-heartedly travelled to Genoa at the end of April.

It was the same for the rest of the evening. They had a meal at one of the outdoor tables, while the dusk deepened and an orchestra somewhere in the distance was playing lilting foreign tunes that threatened to bring back all Jane's pain. Caroline was kind, but to be in Rome in the dusk for the first time ought to have been the most wonderful experience of her life. If only Andrea——

She began to yawn before she had finished her coffee and her companion laughed.

"Bed for you! You can see something of Rome in your lunch-hour tomorrow and every evening."

It was so breathlessly hot, and Jane was so very tired, that she slept almost as soon as she was in bed.

The Blue Dragon office was certainly larger than the one in Genoa and at first Jane was very shy and diffident. But Caroline Wetherby was so kind and helpful, and everyone else so friendly and uncritical, that by the end of her first morning she was finding her feet and realizing that the work differed little from that to which she was used.

The season was rapidly getting into its stride and there was so much to be done that she had little time, during working hours, to remember anything about broken hearts and the pain and despair of the past week-end. When she wasn't working, Rome was there waiting and there was so much to see that it was hard to know where to start. People had spent their lives getting to know it, others had to see what they could during a night or two's stay. Jane, with several nights, was not going to waste a moment. Besides, looking at the buildings that had stood for so many centuries stopped her from thinking of her troubles.

There were times when just being in Rome took her by the throat in a passionate rush of feeling. To stand in St. Peter's Square very early in the morning was an experience she would never forget. She went there at seven o'clock, before the motor-coaches and the jostling crowds had taken possession, and its vastness, its great pillars, the fountains playing, and St. Peter's itself against the vivid sky, seemed unbelievable. How often she had seen pictures—had even seen it on the television—but nothing prepared one for the reality.

Early, too, she went up on to the roof of St. Peter's and saw that magnificent view of the Square and the whole city of Rome outspread. The straight roads, the brown roofs, and, beyond, the soft blue hills. Standing there in the blaze of light, so high that she might have been in an aeroplane, Jane longed for Andrea more sharply than ever before. To be with him, to hear his intelligent comments or just to stand quietly side by

side, that would have been the ultimate happiness. But Andrea was in Genoa and perhaps hated her by now.

"I must come back! I must come back when I'm happy, if I ever am again," Jane thought, and she found her way through the little shadowy streets, where people were putting up market stalls, to the Fountain of Trevi and dropped her coin in to ensure her return. She turned away feeling a little self-conscious, but many other people were doing the same and no one would have thought it in the least odd.

The heat, the vivid life, the endless fountains dropping cool spray, the flowers, the churches. . . . At the end of each day Jane dropped into bed and slept for eight hours dreamlessly.

After so much emotion, hard work and intensive sight-seeing were bound to take their toll, and often she felt tired and in need of peace. By the end of the week she was buying sandwiches and taking them across the busy square to the Baths of Diocletian, though each time she had to pay to enter the place.

In some ways Jane loved it more than anywhere else in Rome; more than that unforgettable view from the roof of St. Peter's. It was always quiet there, though the traffic roared so near, and within the high walls and the great arches were gardens bright with flowers and cool with the spray of fountains. Broken statues stood all around and birds often came up to her in search of crumbs.

At lunchtime she often had a corner entirely to herself and it seemed a dream place, scattered with wild flowers,

in the heart of Rome. She would return to the office refreshed, ready to cope with fussy women who were suffering from the heat and only wanted to get away from Rome, men who had soon tired—heaven help them!—of all that the city had to offer and would have been happier in Brighton, and people of both sexes who were, for some reason or other, dissatisfied with the Blue Dragon tours. Though of course there were many who were happy and well-informed and who perhaps came in to express their appreciation.

She enjoyed her afternoons behind the counter better than the mornings spent almost entirely in the inner office, and every day she seemed to learn more about human nature. She strove to copy Stephen's calm acceptance of its weaknesses and foibles, thinking of him warmly, and with a little guilt, because he had taught her a good deal and she had only hurt him.

On the Friday morning there was a letter from Stephen, addressed to her at the office, and she opened it eagerly, for, in spite of herself, she was hungry for news from Genoa. His second paragraph made her stiffen and feel suddenly a little sick.

"I wonder if you know," he wrote, "that old man Lerrante died last Monday morning and is to be buried today, Thursday? The papers have been full of him, for of course he was an important Genoese figure."

For a time Jane forgot all about the waiting post. So her grandfather was dead, without a reconciliation with her mother! Well, she had not expected anything else, but it seemed strange and poignant that he had gone.

She remembered the shrewd eyes and the lined, disillusioned face and it was a sort of satisfaction to remember that he had seemed to like her.

On Saturday morning the manager called her into his office.

"Well, Miss Graydon, I hope you've enjoyed your week? You've certainly worked well."

"I have enjoyed it. It—it was wonderful of Mr. Crayne to fix it for me," Jane said shyly.

"Yes. Well, Mr. Crayne had the idea that you might perhaps like to spend the winter here. We find plenty to do even in winter and we keep on a fairly full staff, but two of our younger girls are leaving to get married." Which Jane knew already, but it had never occurred to her that such a suggestion might be made.

She gasped, remembering that coin dropped into the Trevi Fountain.

"Oh, I never dreamed—I *should* like it very, very much! I—I thought I'd have to go to Manchester or Newcastle or somewhere like that."

He laughed.

"Well, we can't say anything definite yet, but I'll bear you in mind and we shall see in September. When are you going back to Genoa?"

"Tomorrow. I—I want a little longer here. There's so much that I haven't seen."

"Remember that you may be back, and don't do too much. You're looking tired. Good-bye, my dear."

Jane returned to the inner office in a whirl of startled

excitement. Caroline, who was searching in a filing cabinet, looked curiously at her flushed face.

"Something happened?"

"Yes. I may have the chance to come back here for the winter."

"On, good! That would be splendid. If you come we might share a flat if we can get a cheap one, do you think? My own's really too small, even for one."

So Jane said good-bye to the Blue Dragon feeling that she might see both office and staff again before too long. In fact, the time between seemed utterly vague and impossible to estimate. She knew, with her conscious mind, that by Monday she would be working in Genoa again, but she could not believe it. In fact she dreaded to believe it, for then Andrea would be near, and Maddalena and Desda. What were they all thinking, when she had sent no message of sympathy and no flowers?

On Sunday morning Jane awoke early to the sound of bells. They rang from every church in the city hour after hour, it seemed. She packed her case before breakfast and then ate her rolls and drank her coffee out on the pavement. She was not leaving until lunchtime and she felt a sudden longing to see St. Peter's Square again.

She caught a trolley-bus to a point under the Vatican walls and then walked under those same walls until she was approaching the stone colonnade through which the sunlit square gradually opened before her.

She leaned against a pillar and for a moment she

thought it part of the dream when a voice close at hand said:

“Giovanna!”

She stiffened, but she did not turn round. All her thoughts of Andrea must have affected her brain!

Then out of the corner of her eye, she saw a tall, familiar figure and Andrea put his hand on her arm.

“Jane, my dear!”

Jane spun round, crying “*Andrea!*”, but her voice was drowned by the sound of the bells of Rome.

SEVENTEEN

The Other Giovanna

JANE CAME TO HERSELF A LITTLE DISTANCE FROM the square, sitting at a café table under a red umbrella. Andrea had conducted her there almost without speaking.

He ordered wine for himself and coffee for Jane and his eyes met her distressed ones gravely.

"Jane, don't, please, look like that! In the first moments you were glad to see me."

"I couldn't believe it," Jane said shakily. "I thought I'd—gone a bit queer. I've thought of you so much, at least tried *not* to think—it's been so awful! Oh, Andrea, what are you *doing* here?"

"Looking for you," he said, still gravely, though there was a faint flash of something else in his eyes.

"But—in St. Peter's Square! Why in St. Peter's Square? How did you even know I was in Rome?"

"I telephoned the Blue Dragon office on Friday," he explained, "since Signora Ursello had no idea of your address. And Mr. Morrison told me the name of your hotel. He unfortunately did not know quite when you

would return, but Signora Ursello seemed certain it would not be until today."

"But if that was Friday——"

"My grandfather is dead," he said quietly, "and there has been a great deal of business to attend to. I left for Livorno on Friday and was there until yesterday. It was so late when I reached Rome that I felt it impossible to call at your hotel. I was about to do so this morning when I saw you board a trolley-bus. Unfortunately I missed it, so I took a taxi and followed. The rest you know."

Jane had been thinking flantically and now she turned to him in despair.

"But, Andrea, things are just the same. I told you I couldn't explain."

"There's no need," he said. "For I think I understand. You are Giovanna Lerrante's daughter and my cousin."

Jane was so astonished that she knocked against her coffee cup and the waiter rushed forward to mop up the brown stain.

"Oh, Andrea! But—I promised my mother I'd never tell anyone in Italy. That was the trouble. She was so bitter. She wouldn't have let me go to Genoa unless I promised. Are you angry with me? And how did you guess?"

"No, of course I'm not angry," he said calmly. "It was, I see, a very difficult situation. Meeting us by chance——"

"It *was* chance that first time on the train," Jane said honestly. "But afterwards it wasn't. I met Maddalena

and Desda in the courtyard of the Palazzo Cordoni because I couldn't keep away, and I went to the Staglieno because I half hoped to meet them there and I did. All the same, I knew I shouldn't let it go any further. But it was too strong for me. I liked you all, and—I couldn't help it. But I felt dreadful about Mother, knowing how she'd feel.. She trusted me."

"It was very difficult," he said again. "And it was inevitable that you should want to know us."

"But how—how *did* you guess?"

He was silent for some moments.

"It sounds impossible, but I believe I had suspicions from the first. You were embarrassed when I asked you if you had Italian blood, and when I said you had an Italian look. You didn't really like being called Giovanna, and I knew that my aunt had had the same name. But it was really Desda who crystallized things for me. On Monday night she said suddenly that she thought you were Aunt Giovanna's daughter."

"Desda did?"

"Yes. It seems she's always found that old story romantic; Aunt Giovanna marrying for love and displeasing her father. She'd found an old photograph of Giovanna and kept it, and you remember she drew a picture of you? Desda has an eye for faces, being an artist. She said you were very like Aunt Giovanna, and then my father cried that he had wondered of whom you reminded him, though the eyes were not the same. It was more something in the carriage of the head and the bones of the face."

"And were they angry? Did they believe——?"

"I think they believe," he said, "and they're not angry. My father would be very glad to find his sister, and Maddalena and Desda are delighted to have an English cousin."

Jane felt the shameful tears pricking her lashes.

"It's been so terrible!"

"It isn't terrible any more. All will be well. Oh, Jane, I've had a bad week, too, not seeing you and knowing you were suffering. But I couldn't write; I thought it best to see you."

"But there's still Mother," Jane pointed out. "You don't know her. She's proud and very bitter, really, even though she's been happy. You see, her first husband died quite soon——"

"That we know," he explained. "My father did try to find her, unknown to the old man, three years after she left. She had quite disappeared and he always thought she had married again. Jane, she must forgive you and all of us——"

"Oh, I wish I could think that she would! I love my mother, and admire her very much, but she—at times I'm a little afraid of her. One can't get beyond the barrier of her reserve."

He rose.

"Well, be happy, Jane, for it will all come right. And we love each other. No one will say it matters that we are cousins. I feel sure of that."

"Oh——"

"Now let us get a taxi and go back to your hotel for

your luggage. We'll have lunch on the train and be back in Genoa this evening."

As the taxi turned into the narrow street Jane gave a startled cry, for someone was sitting at one of the tables on the pavement; someone with smooth dark hair and an elegant appearance, who was sipping wine.

"Mother!" Jane gasped and had the door open before the taxi was properly at a standstill. "Mother, how did you get here? What does it mean? I'm so glad to see you!"

"But you wrote to me," said Giovanna Graydon, for once not seeming to dislike a show of feeling. "When I got your letter I was very upset for your sake. I never knew that you could suffer so much, my poor little Jane. So I decided to come —"

"I didn't write to you," Jane said quaveringly. "At least," as light began to dawn, "I wrote, but I didn't post the letter. I knew I couldn't."

"Well, someone posted the letter. Perhaps your landlady, if she found it in your room when she was cleaning. I got it on Wednesday. I couldn't get reservations before Friday, but I reached Genoa yesterday morning and went straight to the Villa Lerrante."

"Oh, Mother!"

"I knew, of course," said Giovanna Graydon quite coolly, "that my father was dead. It was in the English papers."

Only then did Jane remember Andrea, who was standing quietly at her side.

"Mother, this is Andrea. He came to find me, too. I

thought I was—was imagining things when he came up to me in St. Peter's Square. He guessed about my being your daughter. I wouldn't have told him. That is, Desda guessed."

Mrs. Graydon greeted Andrea with that quiet assurance that Jane had never seen ruffled.

"You are just as I imagined. So like my brother. I'm afraid that you and Jane have had a difficult and sad time."

"But now it is over," Andrea said, without any note of question in his voice.

"Now it is over. I travelled from Genoa overnight and rested at a hotel for an hour or two before coming to look for Jane. I knew that you would have found her and it seemed imperative that I should save you both any further unhappiness."

"How did you know where I was?" Jane asked, still half unbelieving.

"My dear, it was Desda again," said her mother, suddenly smiling. "Desda heard Andrea speaking on the telephone to the Blue Dragon office and saw the note he made on the pad."

Jane felt so happy that tiredness and pain were both forgotten.

"What now? Andrea and I were going back to Genoa, having lunch on the train. But you must be so tired——"

"No," said her mother. "I'm coming back to Genoa with you and you'll spend the night at the Villa Lerrante. I'm staying there for a week or so."

"Oh!" Jane could say no more.

In the train, with a compartment to themselves, they talked earnestly together, and Mrs. Graydon said firmly:

"Jane is very young to marry, Andrea. I should hate it to be hurried. I think she should wait until she's twenty, at least. Besides, you hardly know each other, in spite of all the suffering there seems to have been. You can't be quite sure——"

Jane and Andrea exchanged glances.

"We are quite sure," Andrea said quietly. "But I agree with you that we should not perhaps marry until late next year."

"In some ways it will be hard to wait," said Jane. "But I do love the Blue Dragon, in spite of Martha and—and other difficulties. I may have a chance to work in Rome during the winter."

"An excellent idea," said her mother. "Andrea can see you occasionally, but you'll be far enough away from him to be able to concentrate properly on your work."

"And I shall get to know Rome," Jane said, with a little sigh. "I did love it, but I was so miserable. But will everyone mind my working? The Lerrantes don't believe in it for their women!"

Andrea laughed.

"My dear Jane, they won't try to tear you away from the Blue Dragon, and by next year you may even be Manager!"

Jane laughed too.

"I might be a bit more than a junior, that's all. But I

do love it. I don't want to part with my Blue Dragon brooch yet."

"There's no need to do so," he said. "But I'll give you a ring to wear as well."